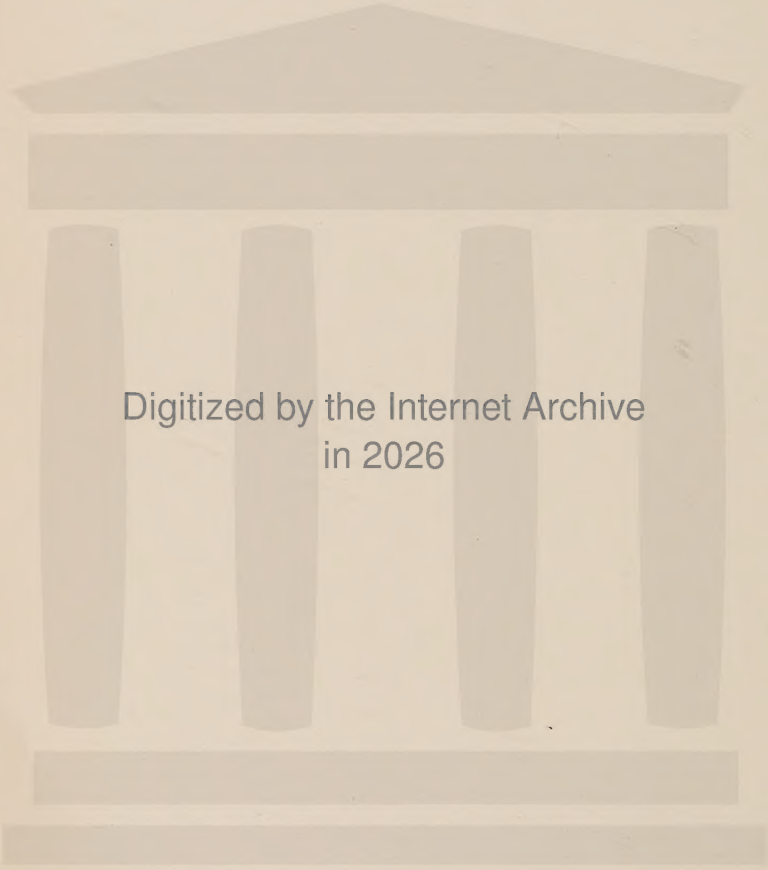
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# ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

## MAN AND WRITER

*There are two distinct duties incumbent on any man who enters on the business of writing : truth to the fact and a good spirit in the treatment.*

*It must always be foul to tell what is false : and it can never be safe to suppress what is true.*

*I am not afraid of the truth . . . but I am afraid of parts of it impertinently uttered. Partiality is immorality.*

*If you are so seriously pained by the misconduct of your subject and so paternally delighted with his virtues, you will always be an excellent gentleman, but a somewhat questionable biographer.*

R. L. S.

*Photograph R. L. S. Notman, Boston, U.S.A.*

# ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

## Man and Writer

*A Critical Biography by*
*J. A. STEUART*

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It may be added that from the first line to the last this book was written in Stevenson's native town amid the scenes which are for ever intimately associated with his memory.

*July* 3, 1924.

# CONTENTS


| CHAPTER | | PAGE |
|---|---|---|
| | INTRODUCTION .. .. .. .. | 1 |
| I | A BIRTH-PROUD PEOPLE .. .. .. | 9 |
| II | THE CHILD .. .. .. .. | 36 |
| III | THE TRUANT SCHOOLBOY .. .. .. | 58 |
| IV | THE SEDULOUS APE .. .. .. | 86 |
| V | A MELODRAMATIC REVOLT .. .. .. | 101 |
| VI | NEW ASSOCIATIONS .. .. .. | 137 |
| VII | W. E. HENLEY .. .. .. .. | 171 |
| VIII | THE GREAT ADVENTURE .. .. .. | 236 |
| IX | UNROMANTIC REALITY AND SOME ENGAGING PHILOSOPHY .. .. .. | 274 |

# ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

## VOL. I

## INTRODUCTION

### THE REAL STEVENSON

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON was born in Edinburgh in 1850 and died in Samoa in 1894. Into his comparatively short life of forty-four years, especially into the last two decades of it, he crowded adventures and experiences such as fell to no other author of his time and to few authors of any time. From birth he was consecrated to Romance. In his cradle the Mystic Mother breathed her magic spell upon him and while he lived it remained unbroken. His brave response to the early and clearly divined call may fitly be expressed in the great lines from *Paradise Lost :*

> Go thou—I shall not lag behind nor err
> The way, thou leading.

And as she led he followed, never lagging behind, never erring the way.

The result is a precious double legacy ; first a delightful contribution to the romantic literature of his country and the world ; next such an example

of courage amid difficulties as must continue to inspire men to remote generations.

In the novelist's outfit many things are essential, but the prime essential is courage, the unwavering, unwearied, unconquerable courage which, like faith, removes mountains. Without it nothing else will avail, not brilliant gifts, nor good fortune, nor any other choice favour of the gods. Art is long; and in the arduous pursuit, the laborious days and "nights devoid of ease," the human spirit is apt to faint and fail. It is the peculiar glory of Stevenson that despite hindrances and obstacles which might well dishearten and dismay, his ardour, his enthusiasm, his determination never abated. The blithe spirit of adventure which was as the breath of life in his nostrils impelled him forward like an informing, animating genius, as in fact it was.

Nor was it the spirit of adventure alone. In all the records of literature there is scarcely an instance of more ardent devotion to an ideal than his, not even with such austere artists as Dante and Milton. The value, the quality of the ideal is another question. Here we are concerned with the fact of its existence, its influence and sustaining power. Stevenson gave to it his whole heart, his whole strength, not grudgingly, not like a coward yielding up what he could not keep, not like a miser doling out alms, but with the joyous ardour of one who, being rich, is eager to give of his riches. In the end he gave his life. And it is because of that dauntless, undeviating valour, which was virtue in action, that the story of his career is so potent to charm and to inspire. To ardent youth lifting its eyes to far horizons aglow with rainbow visions he must long remain a shining avatar. Those who

follow him up the glimmering heights will assuredly breathe a rarefied and stimulating air.

In 1901, seven years after Stevenson's death, appeared the " official " or family biography, by his cousin, Mr. Graham Balfour. It is a work of much interest, as it could scarcely fail to be, written with cousinly sympathy, admiration, piety, and a sedulous suppression of the critical spirit. Clearly Mr. Balfour's task was to produce a family portrait which, so to speak, could be hung in the dining-room for the adoration and consolation of bereaved affection. Inevitably, therefore, the lights were turned high on certain features and on certain others lowered so that these are softened or obscured to the point of extinction. Independent critics at once discerned the hand of the special pleader in the picture. One eminent critic, whose association with Stevenson at the most crucial stage of his career was one of close personal intimacy, recorded a vehement and damaging protest, declaring explicitly that the " Seraph in Chocolate," the " Barley-sugar Effigy " of Mr. Balfour's biography was not R. L. Stevenson at all, but an imaginary figure of flawless, superhuman virtue, set up, draped and adorned, for blind, unquestioning worship. Whether the destructive criticism of W. E. Henley was just or the reverse will be considered in its place.

The biographer writing while his subject is still, as it were, a vivid part of yesterday, has obviously a delicate and difficult task. The naked truth never was and never can be put into obituaries any more than it can be engraved on monuments and tombstones. When Mr. Balfour wrote his book several members of Stevenson's innermost family circle were still alive. Moreover, it was composed under the eye,

under the actual, decisive supervision of Mrs. R. L. Stevenson, a lady of trenchant personality and arbitrary will, whose controlling hand is palpable throughout the narrative, particularly in those parts where a diplomatic reticence might seem the better part of candour. Nor is this at all surprising. Loyalty and affection alike dictated an " In Memoriam " in which the subject should appear with a celestial halo, or at any rate an enviable freedom from common human frailties and follies. The result is the family portrait we possess.

But since it was painted, those to whom Stevenson was closest and dearest, those who cherished his memory rather, it may be, for what he seemed to them than what he was in reality, have followed him to " the undiscovered country from whose bourne no traveller returns." Reticences, evasions, suppressions, trimmings, then perhaps appropriate are no longer desirable or excusable. Stevenson has ceased to be a private family possession set on a domestic pedestal for privileged views, and is relegated to History to be judged by her impartial standards. The *suggestio falsi* and the *suppressio veri* mode of presentation would now be a double wrong—a wrong to his reputation and to the public.

As all students of literature are aware, recent years have brought a vast accumulation of new material bearing on the character and career of Stevenson. Not all of that material is authentic : but much of it is genuine, and, so to speak, clamours for its appropriate place in his true biography. Moreover the courtesy of various people who have looked on Stevenson's face and heard his voice and were familiar with the circumstances of his early life, has enabled me to add much virgin information

to the store. Further, I have had access to important private documents not before available to any biographer. Thus I have been able to trace his ancestry to sources unknown to himself or to those who have hitherto written of him. Those sources explain many of the traits and peculiarities which so hopelessly puzzled his friends, and have misled both his critics and his eulogists.

More important still, it has been my good fortune to obtain specific information concerning that period, at once the darkest and most vital in his whole career, when the young Stevenson appeared to all who knew and loved him to be driving headlong for shipwreck. Yet again I have been able to discover the origin and history of the quarrels and estrangements, both early and late, which at various points embittered his life and seriously affected his work. The light thus obtained enables us for the first time, I believe, to see and understand the man Robert Louis Stevenson as he actually was, alike in his strength and his weakness, his gaiety and his gloom.

And in fine, competent judges with a sense of Stevenson's real worth as a man and a writer feel, lately with sharpened conviction, that the time has come for an authentic biography, written not with less sympathy or appreciation, but with ampler knowledge, sounder understanding, and a greater measure of independence than was possible for Mr. Graham Balfour. We need have no doubt what Stevenson's own judgment would be, could he be consulted. "Everything worth judging," he remarks in a pertinent passage, "whether it be a man or a work of art or only a fine city, must be judged upon its merits as a whole." To be judged upon his merits as a whole would unquestionably

be his own desire as assuredly it is his right. Besides the readers of two continents who receive him joyously as a world-figure in literature are entitled to know what manner of man he was they admire.

The truth, I venture to predict, will increase, not diminish, their admiration. To his account there must be laid deflections from the straight line of rectitude observed by the society into which he was born. He was not immaculate ; but he was not an imposter or hypocrite unctuously affecting virtues he did not possess, though a fatuous idolatry has done its ridiculous worst to make him appear one. He never posed as a " Seraph in Chocolate." That equivocal creation was the work of others, and would, could he know of it, excite his scorn and his resentment, as it would provoke the satire of a Pope or a Burns. Were it said that he was an egotist in the grain, the statement would be undeniable ; but egotism is not hypocrisy ; rather is it the opposite pole of character. Nor does it preclude the love of truth and the practice of sincerity. It may be affirmed with certainty that Stevenson would be the first to repudiate the sham impeccability which an egregious worship has foisted upon him. Like Cromwell, he would insist on being painted as he was and is—" warts and all."

" Paint me as I am," he would say. " No fictitious virtues. No frills, no graces, no sublimities that are not mine. Add nothing ; omit nothing. What if occasionally I was foolish and took the left-hand road ! Have others always been so wise ? In the end I won my wager and recovered my glove. I can bear the truth. If it shames me at one point it glorifies me at another. Strike the balance and let the world judge. For God's sake make me out a living, breathing human being."

To make him out a living, breathing human being is the purpose of this book. He can bear the truth, and less is an insult to his character and his fame. His works attest the accomplished and delightful writer. But behind the writer is the man, intensely alive, most fascinatingly, often most pathetically human. And as this human quality, this common heritage of the race properly understood, endears him to us, as showing that he shares our own fallibility, our own limitations, weaknesses, and pitiful failures, so it is the key to all that is essentially and enduringly characteristic in his writings. He was not perfect any more than we are perfect. The perfect man, should he ever appear, will be a monster whom all the world will avoid. In Stevenson's own words, " We esteem people for their virtues, but love them for their faults."

Renan remarks that saints are usually rather dull people.

We must agree that for the most part they lack the warm, genial, all-embracing humanity of the creative artist whose mission it is to observe, portray, and interpret human nature as he finds it in the seething world about him, not as it may exist in the sheltered seclusion of cloisters and convents. That is what Stevenson set himself to do, and he was not dull. He was no anchorite. He did not run away from life nor scorn its delights any more than he shunned its battles. A more intrepid spirit has not graced or inspired the world of letters in recent generations. And were he speaking for himself, he might well remind us that the great men, the moving spirits of the ages whether in thought or in action, seldom adorn the calendar of the " unco' guid " or " the rigidly righteous." It is not for his saintliness that we adore David and

linger enthralled over the gripping, moving humanity of his story. It is not his saintliness that makes Burns the most beloved of poets, or Nelson the hero and darling of his countrymen. Assuredly it is not as a saint, with the Shorter Catechism under one arm and the Solemn League and Covenant under the other, that Stevenson makes his real appeal. His is a higher, wider glory than that of mere creed. He not only wrote romance, he lived romance. If, therefore, we accept Milton's dictum that he who would write a great poem must first make his life a poem, then Stevenson is justified of his faith. His was not a facile conquest. If it were, he should not be what he is, more heroic than any of his own fictitious heroes. For in the elements of true heroism not a David Balfour nor an Alan Breck among them equals their creator.

# CHAPTER I

## A BIRTH-PROUD PEOPLE

THE comic muse has long been wont to make merry over the spectacle of the infatuated Scot vauntfully flourishing his family tree. An inflated vanity, so the jest runs, must needs provide itself with illustrious progenitors—legendary kings, thanes, and chiefs of fabulous renown—and the attributes which made them glorious are perpetuated (and augmented) in their latest descendant.

Satire apart, it may be owned that hereditary pride does swell the Scottish breast. "Remember them you come of" is a sentiment to which Scotland, the Empire, and the world owe more then the satirist guesses. For, being a cardinal fact in national psychology, it makes the Scot what he is, an overweening patriot, a stickler for tradition, a maker and moulder of history, a dauntless, at times a fierce, exponent of racial virtues. In January 1923 there was unveiled in the old quadrangle of Edinburgh University a memorial to the band of young heroes, sons of the University, who, when Freedom was imperilled, hastened forth and gave their lives that she might not perish from the earth. At the foot of the bronze tablets inscribed with nearly a thousand names, a students' wreath of laurel was deposited, bearing the simple inscription, *All Earth is witness that they answered as*

*befitted their Ancestry*. In spirit, as in brevity and beauty, this plain statement of a great fact, put on record in words borrowed from Mr. Rudyard Kipling, suggests Simonides or the Greek Anthology. Neither has anything nobler, more touchingly true than the proud tribute by comrades and successors to the valour of Scottish boys going gloriously to death because their fathers would have had it so. As by a flash of genius it lights the secret springs of the Scottish heart, and in particular its quenchless fidelity to the past and the spirit of those who went before.

This inspiring reverence for lineage, this passionate, inextinguishable devotion to kindred and home, is indeed the keynote of the Scottish character :

> One-half our soil has walked the rest,
> In patriots, heroes, martyrs, sages.

The Scot is an inveterate wanderer. There is no corner of the habitable globe to which he has not penetrated. You may follow his track and behold his works on the uttermost confines of civilisation, and often where no civilisation exists. Others noting his propensities to wander have remarked, less in jest than in earnest, that he is never so much at home as when he is abroad, never so happy as when his ambition grasps the prizes in lands far from his own. But however far-flung his Odyssey, whatever his fortune, be he millionaire or pauper, his heart turns yearningly to the grey land of mist and mountain which nourished his youth, which furnished his ideals and sentiments, which holds the dust of his forbears. The long chain of heredity binds him as by a spell. Scott seeking health in the sunshine of Italy begs to be taken home that he may die with the music of the

Tweed in his ears. Stevenson, an exile on an island in the Pacific, yearns with ever-increasing intensity for his own inclement, inhospitable city by the Forth and the faces there he can never see again. The emotion is as Scots, as characteristic as " Scotch Drink " or the Shorter Catechism.

## Stevenson's Quest for Ancestry

Nor is it without solid sanction and justification. For under the high warrant of science the jest of the satirist has become the problem of the historian, the ethnologist, and the biographer. In his *Memoir of Fleeming Jenkin* Stevenson observes : " Genealogies have taken a new lease of life, and as we study we think less of Sir Bernard Burke and more of Mr. Galton. Not only do our characters and talents lie upon the anvil and receive their temper during generations, but the very plot of our life's story unfolds itself on the scale of centuries, and the biography of the man is only an episode in the epic of the family."

That family epic, that ancestral Little Iliad, became to Stevenson himself a subject of ceaseless absorption, almost a monomania. He is constantly reverting to it, dwelling on it, probing, guessing, theorising, doing his utmost to secure a lineage which should bear the severe scrutiny of his birth-proud countrymen. He pursues his unwearied quest through vapid family chronicles, musty " gushy " letters, references, anecdotes, traditions, whatever might promise a ray of light on that engrossing problem of pedigree. Even the records of the criminal law are not neglected. And as the passion began early, so it continued late.

Almost the last letter he wrote was a request for aid in his search ; and, indeed, it may be said he died trying to establish for his progenitors a foothold in history, a niche in the domestic annals of their country. Byron, it has been said, was prouder of counting among his ancestors certain lords who crossed to England with William the Conqueror than of being the author of " Childe Harold " and " Manfred." Stevenson, one is tempted to believe, would have been more gratified to discover an ancestor in Doomsday Book than he was to be acclaimed the author of *Kidnapped* and *Catriona*, *Underwoods* and *A Child's Garden of Verses*.

His quest proved disappointing. The lustre and renown of antiquity, which he sought with so much devoted ardour for more than twenty years, he failed to find. As already stated, I am able to give particulars of which he was ignorant and trace his ancestry to sources which, had he discovered them, would certainly have excited him to exultation. Before doing so, however, it will be convenient to glance rapidly at his own story of descent.

His volume *Records of a Family of Engineers* partly reveals the eagerness of his researches upon the genealogy and history of the clan whose name he bore. The chronicle opens picturesquely in the thirteenth century, when a Stevenson of Stevenson, in the county of Lanark, with other " people of importance," tendered allegiance to Edward I. Whether the oath was taken voluntarily or the House was suspect does not appear. Thence the fond genealogist traces what he calls a " backward progress " to the year 1700, when, as he supposes, the clan was landless. There, however, curious antiquaries have found him wrong. At that date

Stevensons still held land in the Shires of Haddington and Ayr ; but there appears to be no question that the family suffered a territorial decline. What the cause of that decline might be, whether it was misfortune or misconduct or a blend of both, is a matter of conjecture. Obviously the family was not of sufficient consequence for the national historian, and the silence of private records leaves us guessing.

The real romance of Scotland lives in her songs and stories. Border ballads, Highland lays, tales of Homeric prowess, passion of more than Latin vehemence and wildness—these enshrine the deeds and histories of the past as they appeal to the popular imagination. Neither in peace nor in war, neither in love nor in foray, did the Stevensons of olden time play a conspicuous or romantic part. Song and story ignore them ; and, indeed, it is not until we reach late generations that members of the family begin to emerge from a long and obscure mediocrity. To that later roll must be added the name that shines most brilliantly of all, the name of Robert Louis Stevenson himself. But for him, who searched so zealously for some shred of inherited glory, the Clan Stevenson would be unknown to fame save within the narrow circle of engineers and lighthouse-builders. As by a stroke of magic it is the prerogative of genius to confer distinction on an entire race.

The Stevensons then moved obscurely, and the safer, perhaps, because obscurely, through " the brawl that makes Scots history." Occasionally they scrambled into Parliament. Some half-dozen instances are recorded, and for aught I know each of them may have been as expert a gambler as any successor of to-day in the equivocal game of cabal

and caucus which, with delicate satire, we call politics. Since democracy in its present resplendent form had not then emerged even as a dream, the parliamentary Stevensons must obviously have belonged to the " governing classes." At one point a priest, at another a brace of physicians impart a pleasantly professional air. One at least mounted the bench in all the dazzling glory of a bailie, and may well have passed judgment on black sheep of his own kindred, cannily commending their souls to Heaven while sternly committing their bodies to prison.

Inevitably a true-blue Covenanter embellishes the record. He appears in the seventeenth century in the person of John, a farmer of " Daily Parish in Carrick," a notably pious man whom the family historian describes as " a poor, sickly soul disabled with scrofula." Nevertheless, to the scrofulous, sickly John fell the ineffable glory of engaging in a hand-to-hand combat with Satan, and gallantly routing the enemy. Had he gone down in the dread encounter, " it might," as he quaintly remarked, " have brought a great reproach upon religion." But he was ordained to win as champion of the Cause, and his amazing victory is joyously celebrated in the chronicles of the Covenant.

Our Stevenson mentions him as " the one living and memorable figure " in a prosaic succession. Since, however, he is claimed merely as a " collateral " ancestor, it would be too wild a fancy to suppose that in him we see the primary impulse which two centuries later was to produce *Lay Morals* and *Vailima Prayers*. Others of the name were more politic or less valiantly pious. One stood sentry by the great door of Holyrood Palace while plotting lords were " dispatching Rizzio

within," thus for one brief moment making a dramatic appearance on the stage of history. Another burned his fingers in the Gowrie plot, but contrived to save his skin and neck by timely flight. For the rest in the quaint language of ancient chronicles the Stevensons were indwellers of good repute, respected burgesses, tradesmen, quietly and prudently serving their day and generation, as bakers, maltsters, millers, and the like, decent honest folk, as Stevenson relates, " playing the character parts of the Waverley Novels with propriety if without distinction."

If distinction is lacking, so inevitably is romance. There are no garnerings of the rich harvest of tradition which is the dower of multitudes of families on both sides of the border, a dower which would have been at once a precious patrimony and a source of inspiration to the latter-day teller of tales. The House of Stevenson furnishes its romancer with no heroes, no heroines to charm or thrill readers of fiction. He made ingenious efforts to smuggle them in and glorify them under other names—MacGregors, for example—but the attempts were futile. The best he could do was to introduce a Balfour ; and David cuts but a poor figure beside Alan Breck and John Silver.

Nor has Stevenson himself the lineaments of his race physically or temperamentally. Why the deviation from type ? Whence does he derive the traits and qualities which differentiate him so sharply from preceding bearers of his name ? As we shall see, there were influences working in his blood of which he was himself unaware, after the most strenuous researches in family history and heredity. Before, however, proceeding to that alien heritage, let us briefly consider the family

tree as it appears stripped of fond surmises and hypotheses.

## Respectability and Piety

The eminently practical family of engineers which, as by a freak of nature, produced a devotee of pure romance originated, so far as can be discovered, in the West of Scotland, and there in the county of Renfrew and parish of Neilston. They were farming-folk straight from the soil, and exhibited, it may be presumed, the solid virtues and sharp limitations of their class. In politics they were Whigs of the old school, though their later descendants in Edinburgh developed vehement and even aggressive Tory principles. It is not uncommon for people, ambitiously climbing the social ladder, to discard old creeds as they discard old clothes to harmonise with the new environment. Aristocratic sentiments and rising fortunes go naturally together, and the cobbler's grandson, moneyed or titled, must needs disown the ancestral bodkin and leather apron.

Hence the transmutation of the Stevensons from Whigs to Tories need not be too readily construed as snobbery nor as a supple imitation of the agile and politic Vicar of Bray. By the time Louis came upon the scene the political tenets of the family were firmly rooted, had, in fact, attained the sanctity of a religion. With his pap he imbibed a fervid love of Toryism and as fervid a hatred of all things Radical. "He detested Mr. Gladstone, I am pleased to say," wrote Mr. Henley in an article which has never been thought to have any taint of panegyric. His political creed he accepted

ready-made ; other creeds he made for himself ; and they were not shaped according to family pattern.

The first authentic date in the history of the Westland Whigs is 1665, when James Stevenson, a farmer or farmer's son of Nether Carsewell, in his native county, took to wife one Jean Keir. To them ten years later was born in Glasgow a son, Robert. He in turn married—twice—and among ten children born to him and his second wife, Elizabeth Cumming, were two sons, Hugh and Alan. That they were boys of exceptional ability, energy, and enterprise their brief but stirring careers prove. With them, indeed, comes the first real spice of romance in the drab, prosaic Stevenson records. While still mere youths they established a prosperous business in the West Indies with a home branch in " the clean and handsome little city on the Clyde." Glasgow will appreciate the compliment. Hugh, the elder, went abroad as managing partner, leaving the younger brother to manage the home establishment.

In love as in business Alan was precocious. At nineteen he married Jean Lillie, the pious and excellent daughter of a Glasgow builder, and he was but twenty when his only son, another Robert, was born. The adventurous young brothers seemed to be making swiftly for fortune when suddenly a crushing calamity befell them. A trusted agent turned thief, involving them in ruin. Alan was summoned by his brother to aid in hunting down the criminal, the law being both weak and incompetent. Day and night, from island to island, the two pursued him in an open boat. Their adventures were the very stuff of heroic romance, and doubtless gave more than one hint and impulse to

the author of *Treasure Island*. But, as with Sisera, the stars in their courses fought against them. The pursuit cost them their lives. Simultaneously they were struck down by fever, due to hardship and exposure, and they died broken and beggared men. As though to make calamity worse, the Glasgow builder died at the same time, leaving no estate for his daughter. Alan's wife and child were left penniless.

By and by the young widow, who was a woman of force and character, removed with her boy to Edinburgh, and there some years later one Thomas Smith, a "merchant burgess," appears on the scene with far-reaching results. Tom Smith had had his share of hardship, and seems to have been braced and hardened by his experiences. The son of a skipper of Broughty Ferry who was lost at sea, he migrated early to the Scottish capital, carrying with him, it may well be, a dash of brine in the blood. He did not, however, follow his father's calling, though Fate decreed he was to have much to do with the sea. Ambitious to succeed, pushing, confident, and competent, he established a "solid business in lamps and oils," became in fact sole proprietor of the Greenside Company's works, under the shoulder of Calton Hill, a conspicuous concern in its day. I invite the reader to note those Greenside works as an important landmark in the old dead time. For in them originated not only much with which seafaring people are now familiar, but particularly and specifically the fortunes of the House of Stevenson as known to later generations.

The rocky, treacherous coast of Scotland had long been the terror of mariners. Every year it took a heavy toll of ships and lives. The peril was

so constant, the loss so great, that at last public action was taken to afford distressed or bewildered navigators some guidance among deadly reefs and breakers. The Board of Northern Lights came into being, and Thomas Smith, ready with his illuminants, his lamps and oils to replace primitive coal-fires, was appointed its first engineer. Then came an unexpected turn of destiny which would delight a novelist in search of complicated and risky family relations. Thomas Smith, already twice a widower though but thirty-three, married the widow of Alan Stevenson. Twelve years later her son Robert, grandfather of Louis, married Smith's daughter by his first wife, Elizabeth Couper, the daughter of a Liberton farmer. "The marriage of a couple who had lived for twelve years as brother and sister is hard to conceive," comments Stevenson. Nevertheless the odd experiment proved happy and fruitful, alike in the spheres of matrimony and business.

Piety presided over the union, both Jean Lillie and Jean Smith being "eminently pious." Piety, indeed, was a constant ingredient in the constitution of the womenfolk, whose chief care seems to have been to produce children and rear them in "the nurture and admonition of the Lord." Moreover, they ruled their husbands with a rod of piety, which, however, did not prevent the intrusion of the worldly spirit and the good Scot's passion for "getting on."

Presently Robert Stevenson became joint-engineer with Thomas Smith, stepfather and father-in-law in one, and the strange partnership prospered. When by and by Thomas Smith retired, a comparatively affluent man, his stepson succeeded him, thus establishing the family of engineers. A Life

of Robert Stevenson by his son David reveals him as a remarkable man, not only with a brain for engineering, but a gusto for adventure and something of the poet's gifts and ideals. For nearly half a century—1797 to 1843—he held his official appointment under the Board of Northern Lights, and during that long period was responsible for the construction of many harbours and docks, in addition to some eighteen lighthouses. Of the most famous of those pioneer enterprises, the Bell Rock Lighthouse, he has himself left an account which may still be read with interest for its picturesque and graphic touches, and its revelations of an independent and intrepid spirit. It was with him that Sir Walter Scott made the cruise commemorated in the Introduction to *The Pirate*, a memorable bit of family history most dearly cherished. "To be mentioned in Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*," remarks Thackeray, "is like having your name written on the façade of St. Peter's in Rome." To be mentioned with approbation in the preface to one of the Waverley Novels is an honour not less distinguished and enduring.

To Robert and his pious wife thirteen children were born, most of whom died in infancy, infant mortality being then a feature of the family history. Five survived, and of those, three sons, Alan, David, and Thomas, the father of Louis, followed in the paternal footsteps. They were notable men in their generation; but it must not be forgotten that the impulse which carried them up and on came from the Broughty Ferry skipper's son, the proprietor of the Greenside Works. From him and his lamps and oil, his foresight, his energy, his hazardous cruises, followed all that made the Northern

Lighthouse System a record of romance no less than a triumph of science.

## The Celtic Myth

In his ancestral researches Stevenson explored with unwearied gusto certain vapoury traditions which, interpreted by "the preconceived idea," appeared to give him a Celtic lineage. "The name Stevenson," he observes, "has a certain air of being Norse"; and through possible changes of nomenclature he connects it with the Clan MacGregor, suggesting proudly that he may be an actual descendant of the redoubtable Rob Roy. He is compelled to admit that all Stevensons cannot have been of the Clan Alpin, but holds to the notion that some might be and probably were; and he dotes on the idea that James Stevenson of Glasgow, his "first authentic ancestor," may have had "a Highland alias on his conscience and a claymore in his back parlour." The conscience is a matter of speculation; but a claymore, possibly smuggled from Glasgow, was in fact discovered in the back parlour of a reputable London citizen, editor and publisher of the *Wesleyan Times*, who was thought to have changed from MacGregor to Stevenson, because the former was "not a good Methodist name." Probably not, indeed. The scion of an outlawed clan would scarcely be reckoned an ornament by London Methodism. But Stevenson held to the conviction that the proscribed MacGregor was there all the same, veiled as a follower of John Wesley. In the letter already mentioned, written two days before his death, to Sir James Balfour Paul, Lyon King-of-Arms, he asks: "Why, where,

and when did the MacGregors use the name of Stevenson ? " And he inquires what truth there was in the report, made by Sir Herbert Maxwell, that the MacGregors had registered the Stevenson arms, " or at least the chevron ? " He is obliged to confess that he has been unable to obtain " one scintilla of evidence as to the wherefor " of the thing.

Having started his romantic quest, however, he was encouraged to go on. Someone in London discovered, or pretended to discover, in his writings what Matthew Arnold called " the lineaments of Celtic genius." It follows that if you have Celtic lineaments you must be a Celt somewhere in the core of your being. Stevenson's Highland inheritance being, it was thought, indisputable, the pertinent question arose, Whence did it come ? What remote, forgotten ancestor, in lonely glen or by the wild western sea, bequeathed to him that legacy of magic and mysticism, that haunting eerie imagination, that uncanny intuition and weird, half-ghostly gift of second sight, which critics found so plentifully displayed in his work ?

Did the dauntless Rob Roy actually move in his blood to break out erratically in the tame nineteenth century ? Was he, in short, a son of the Children of the Mist, the late descendant of a proscribed clan, masquerading under a safe and respectable alias ? It is a pretty and romantic theory, and it pleased Stevenson greatly. Students of heredity with a taste for patness in pedigree were equally pleased. Ah ! now the volatile, elusive Stevenson was accounted for ! Personal traits and idiosyncrasies were cited as incontrovertible evidence. His odd un-Lowland appearance, his manners, gestures, tastes, all that was bizarre and ludicrous in him,

what were they but part of that Celtic inheritance? Was he freakish, elfish, now absurdly gay, now as absurdly gloomy? Here was the explanation. He was a Celt. The golden key to puzzles and paradoxes had been found, and the secret make-up of Robert Louis Stevenson could be read like an open book. It was all as simple, as convenient as a crib to Euclid, as authentic as an amateur astronomer's guide to the mysteries of the Solar System. For his own part, be it repeated, the hypothesis of a Highland ancestry fascinated Stevenson, and he died believing it true.

Why, it will naturally be asked, should he have striven so ardently to prove a Celtic ancestry? The answer, I think, touches an interesting question in psychology: In the Highlands "the brawl that makes up Scots history" is compact of romance. There, if anywhere, the enchantments of "old, unhappy, far-off things" linger like a spell. North of the Grampians the whole land is, as Arnold said of Oxford, steeped in sentiment, and more than Oxford was once "the home of lost causes and impossible loyalties." Defeat may well be more splendid, more entrancing than victory. The failures of Prince Charlie are glorious memories to multitudes who have long forgotten the successes of Cumberland; and round the fire of a winter's night you may still hear tales of valour and of fealty which make the nerves tingle and the heart leap in exultation. To say that a clan is proscribed is even now to endow it with all the adorable qualities which quicken the sympathy and rouse the imagination.

Stevenson, ever exquisitely sensitive to the heroic and romantic, was enthralled and fired by stories of Highland courage and Highland fidelity. For

some obscure reason he disliked the English ; for reasons not obscure he still more disliked his fellow-citizens of Edinburgh. If they were Saxon, he could not and would not be Saxon. There was but one alternative : he was Celtic. In proof he set himself arduously to discover or create a fit genealogy. For a born romantic, a constitutional and congenital rebel, a contemner of the politic prudences and long-faced professions about him, it would be a superb thing to demonstrate his descent from a race that recognised no authority but its own, and consistently acted on " the good old rule, the simple plan " of doing what and how it pleased. He sought confirmation in legend and tradition, and by a little ingenious exercise of fancy, found it. MacGregor and Stevenson were interchangeable names used of old as necessity or convenience dictated. Therefore he was a MacGregor, toned down, indeed, to the mean, prosaic conditions of the nineteenth century as it ruled in Edinburgh, but indubitably a son of lawless caterans and heroic freebooters. The fact that this theory did violence to the Stevenson tradition does not appear to have troubled him. Perhaps in the intentness of his quest he forgot that record of respectability and piety which was the pride of his family.

To the Celtic fancy he tacked on another which might also be called anti-Saxon. This was a possible inheritance of French blood through a certain barber–surgeon who was thought to have come from France in the train of the notorious Cardinal Beaton. He could discover no details. " But," he observes naïvely, " I am tempted to suppose there may be something in it."

To these fancies, in particular to the Celtic fancy, Stevenson, as I have said, died clinging. Beliefs at once so plausible and so dearly held are not to be lightly denied. The fact, therefore, that they must be pronounced pure illusions brings a pang of regret, almost of remorse. Of the barber-surgeon not a trace is discoverable, and it may be stated with certainty that no such person ever existed among the ancestors of Robert Louis Stevenson. With equal certainty the Celtic ancestry must be dismissed to the region of myths. Whatever Celtic qualities may or may not be discernible in Stevenson the writer (and that subject will be considered later), in Stevenson the man there was not a drop of Highland blood, even in the most diluted form. The Celtic traits which he found in his father; the Celtic traits which others, following a blind lead, found in himself, were, so far as heredity is concerned, simply non-existent. It is a pity to destroy pretty and alluring theories, theories, moreover, which in the case of Stevenson seemed to elucidate and explain so much; but in biography at least fact takes precedence of fiction, however gratifying the latter may be to pride or vanity.

Was Robert Louis Stevenson, then, of the common, hard, practical, unimaginative Lowland stock he found about him? He was accounted odd. Were his oddities, his apparent deviations from the normal in temperament and disposition, but outcroppings, freakish ebullitions of what, after all, is inherent and fundamental in the Scottish character? Fortunately, I am able to answer that interesting and pertinent question with information which illumines many dark recesses, as it solves many puzzles of a complex and often contradictory

character. And I venture to believe that the lineage now for the first time made known would have gratified the eager genealogist searching so assiduously for a " potential ancestry " among Highland clans and fabled barber–surgeons from France.

## The Foreign Inheritance

By some subtle intuition, some dimly-realised sense of hereditary influences, Stevenson himself appears to have felt, and felt strongly, that somehow, from some undiscovered source, he had alien blood in his veins, blood, that is, which did not originate within the bounds of Scotland. He was right ; and the foreign blood was French, though the mythical barber–surgeon had nothing to do with its transmission.

To trace its downward course we must take a backward leap of nearly four centuries, not, however, direct to France, but to two lairds in the district of Blairgowrie, in Perthshire, their names Freer of Essendie and Blair of Ardblair. The Freers appear to have been peaceful and law-abiding ; the Blairs turbulent, predatory, and defiant. Our first glimpse is of one John Blair, with two neighbouring lairds and a company of fourscore men-at-arms " with jacks, steel bonnets, coats of mail, lance-staves, lang culverins with lichtit lunts and ither wepins invasive," a formidable gang, invading the kirk of Blair during divine service, in search of one Drummond of Blair, who was marked for destruction. They did not find him in the kirk, but presently they found him on the bowling-green, engaged in a game of bowls, the unfortunate man, though it was Sunday. He

got scant time for prayer or repentance, for immediately his enemies were upon him, slaying both him and his young son. That was in 1554. The murder was reported to the Privy Council, and John Blair, called to account, offered to make atonement, as is quaintly recorded in ancient documents, by three distinct acts of penance :

(1) " To gang or cause to gang to the four head Pilgrimages of Scotland "—Melrose, Dundee, Scone, and Paisley.

(2) " To pray for the souls of the deceased in the kirk of Blair "—a piously satirical stroke ; and—

(3) " To pay a small money assythement."

Quite clearly John Blair was a man of resource, nerve, and humour, fitted to shine in any business in which audacity and courage tell. His cynical offer was rejected ; probably the shrewd man knew it would be, and that his suggested mode of reparation was merely a pretty, humourous piece of bluff. What happened next is not quite clear. Perhaps the Privy Council already had its hands full of thorns and had no desire to provoke a quarrel with the militant John and his ferocious men-at-arms with their all-too-ready " wepins invasive." Or it may not have loved poor Drummond, and politicly winked at his removal by one who dared to do what it durst not do itself. Privy Councils in that stirring and picturesque time had a way of picking and choosing in their dispensations of justice. At any rate, the redoubtable Blair survived, possibly with a public admonition and a private note of commendation, to avenge himself on other enemies without pretence of praying for their souls. Had Stevenson known of him, we should certainly have a fascinating chapter in biography, and not improbably " John Blair " would have been gleefully

substituted for "Rob Roy" in the genealogical record.

With the amelioration of national manners the family tradition grows milder. In course of time John's descendant, Helen Blair, renouncing old feuds, married the Rev. George Freer, of Essendie, minister of Invernethie. How John would have viewed that alliance with the Kirk may be imagined. Later again—in 1748, to be exact—Helen's descendant, Adam Freer, married Margaret Lizars, a native of Edinburgh. Here we touch French blood. Margaret's father, David Lizars, was a farmer in Damhead, on the Water of Leith, and her mother, Isobel Anderson, daughter of Henry Anderson, a "portioner" of Newington, now a southern suburb of Edinburgh. They were all people of substance. To farming David added brewing, and, prospering in both, built or bought himself a residence at Fountainbridge and was accounted a man of importance in his day. Margaret's grandfather, John Lizars, also farmed land at Damhead, but the first of the Scottish Lizars was a French *émigré* who seems to have crossed to Scotland late in the sixteenth or very early in the seventeenth century, and settled in the capital. The name then appears as Lisouris, but soon became corrupted to Lizars.[1] The Scots version, it may be explained incidentally, was long supposed to have been derived from the fact that the first who bore it in Scotland was said to have been the keeper of a Lazar House, or Leper Hospital. Competent authority has, however, disproved that fanciful origin. Leper Houses were not called Lazar Houses but "Lipertouns,"

[1] In 1608 a Lizouris was apprenticed to Andrew Hairt or Hart, a notable Edinburgh printer who receives honour in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. The name, it may be added, exists variously in France as "Lizer," "Liziar," and "Leseur" or "Leseures."

and to-day popular philology—quite accurately, I am informed—finds a survival of the word in Liberton, a southern suburb of Edinburgh.

Dropping the French connection, the Lizars to all intents and purposes became an indigenous part of the community in which they lived. Down the generations they continued to mingle blood with that of reputable families in the land of their adoption; enjoyed a varying fortune, rose, declined, and rose again, achieving distinction in more than one member. Manifestly they were men of ambition and ability with a decided bent for art, doubtless a Gallic heritage. One became a noted engraver, another (on the female side) according to a well-attested tradition, won world-wide fame in the person of Sir David Wilkie. Three illustrious Scotsmen devoted their genius to the delineation of Scottish life and character—Burns, Scott, and Wilkie, and the last is not the least successful. "The Reading of the Will," "The Penny Wedding," and "Rent Day" are examples of Scottish life caught and fixed for ever in terms of art. To students of heredity this eminence in the plastic arts is significant for what it suggests in the coming writer of romance who was to make a yet wider and more intimate appeal.

Nor were the family gifts entirely artistic. In science also it makes a creditable appearance. As late as 1835 Alexander Jardine Lizars graduated M.D. in the University of St. Andrews, and after practising a few years in Edinburgh, became Professor of Anatomy in Aberdeen University, holding the Chair from 1841 to 1863.[1] With art

[1] As recently as 1897 a gold medal for anatomy was founded in Aberdeen by the widow of Dr. Lazars and is awarded annually.

and science went a capacity for affairs. The early engraver, or an immediate successor, turning aside from engraving, set up in business as an optician, and the firm he founded is to-day honourably known throughout the kingdom.

Until a late date neither a Stevenson nor a Balfour appears in the record of blended home and foreign pedigrees. We now approach the point of contact and interfusion. In 1782 Marion Freer, daughter of Adam Freer and Margaret Lizars, married the Rev. George Smith, of Galston Parish, Ayrshire ; and twenty-six years later—that is to say, in 1808, the year that saw the publication of " Marmion "—their daughter, Henrietta, became the wife of the Rev. Lewis Balfour, minister of Colinton, Midlothian. Margaret Lizars was therefore the great-great-grandmother of Robert Louis Stevenson.

Here we have a singular mixing of bloods—the wild Blairs, the less wild Freers, the adventurous " French *émigré* " uniting and slipping down the generations unperceived to appear with all their blended attributes and contrasts in the quiet seclusion and rigid orthodoxy of Colinton Manse. Did Henrietta Smith guess what dower she was bringing to the Rev. Lewis Balfour ; did the Rev. Lewis Balfour dream what his choice of a bride was to mean ? There is a touch of satire in the fact that the heterodox Louis Stevenson got the traits, the tastes and peculiarities which were to make him at once a riddle and an offence to so many from that home of respectability and orthodoxy. But Fate is ever the most subtle of satirists. In tracing Stevenson's life and career we shall have to bear constantly in mind those strange, far-off sources, that mingled inheritance which gave the final bent

to his character and genius. The legendary barber-surgeon, the legendary MacGregors disappear, and are replaced by ancestors who are not legendary but authentic.

The Rev. George Smith, whom chance has twice thrust into prominence in literary history, is the Smith of the

> . . . cauld harangues
> On practice and on morals—

dubiously immortalised by Burns in " The Holy Fair."

On the maternal or Balfour side we trench on Covenanting history. A Balfour ancestor, Robert Hamilton of Airdrie, fought at Bothwell Brig under a cousin, Hamilton of Preston, near Prestonpans, and both suffered exile for the cause. Louise Hamilton, daughter of the Bothwell Brig warrior, made a romantic marriage with James Balfour of the House of Pilrig, a name famous in the family annals and now well known to readers of romance. Through another Balfour ancestress, Cecilia Elphinstone, daughter of Sir John Elphinstone of Logie and Sheriff of Aberdeen, Stevenson was brought into a distant cousinship with Lord Byron, a relationship which may or may not be significant. There was also a remote connection with the Gordons of Gight, in Aberdeenshire, Byron's ancestors on his mother's side, as well as with the " Tiger Earl " of Crawford, a man of dread in his time, and (singularly enough through the Rev. George Smith) with the fierce Earls of Buchan. Even the notorious " Wolf of Badenoch " is dragged into the genealogical record, though, so far as I can discover, with little reason.

It should be noted that Cecilia Elphinstone's mother was an Elliot of the turbulent, unfortunate border clan of that name. Here we touch the family tree of Scott. Gilbert Elliot of Stobs married Margaret, the daughter of "Auld Wat" Scott of Harden, commemorated in "The Lay of the Last Minstrel," and his wife Mary, "the Flower of Yarrow" still celebrated in border song. Margaret's brother was Sir William Scott, from whom were descended in direct succession Walter Scott of Raeburn, Walter Scott known in his native Teviotdale as "Beardie," Robert Scott of Sandyknowe, and Walter Scott, Writer to the Signet in Edinburgh, father of the immortal Sir Walter. From Margaret herself was descended the first Sir Gibert Elliot of Minto, whose granddaughter was Cecilia Elphinstone, grandmother of the Rev. Lewis Balfour. John Balfour, Cecilia's son, and Sir Walter Scott were therefore fifth cousins, an interesting link in the history of romantic literature.

Of his border ancestry Stevenson remarks, "I have shaken a spear in the debatable land and shouted the slogan of the Elliots." And it is worthy of note that perhaps the only woman he ever drew from the heart out was an Elliot, the Elder Kirstie in *Weir of Hermiston*.

The Balfours make a direct appearance more than once in Scottish history. One Andrew, minister of Kirknewton, near Ratho, took a prominent part in the "Protestation" of 1617, and very narrowly escaped the glory of martyrdom. His son James figures dimly as Clerk of Session in the time of Cromwell (he was appointed in 1649), and doubtless had his own troubled thoughts concerning the grim Oliver and his iconoclastic doings, events

which must have been extremely disquieting to a peaceable Clerk of Session. Nevertheless, the politic James preserved an eye to the main chance, and by marrying an heiress, Bridget Chalmers, secured the estate of Balbitan, Keith Hall. Their son, likewise James, appears questionably as governor of the notorious Darien Company, having as associate no less a person than William Paterson, founder of the Bank of England. That disastrous venture cost him his fortune. But the family was soon on its feet again, and a generation later we find a Balfour, son of the Darien adventurer, buying or rebuying the estate of Pilrig, between Edinburgh and Leith. David the hero of *Kidnapped* (unless that honour belong to Alan Breck) was a Balfour of Pilrig, and the name, as I have remarked, figures conspicuously in the family chronicles. There, writes a reverently-adoring chronicler, the buyer's " descendants kept up the Godly and honourable traditions of the house," the Darien affair being apparently forgotten or forgiven. Yet another Balfour of Pilrig, the great-great-grandfather of Louis, was Professor of Moral Philosophy in Edinburgh University from 1754 to 1764 and may have transmitted the taste for ethics which Stevenson fondly avows. The curious may trace certain features of the Professor's character in *Catriona*.

But our first real contact with the Balfours is at Colinton Manse, in the picturesque region of the Pentlands. The Rev. Lewis Balfour, D.D. (baptismally James Lewis), third son of a Pilrig laird, reigned there for thirty-seven years as minister of the parish—a divine of the old school, so called ; that is, a strict adherent to Scots orthodoxy as yet untainted by any leaven of German

scepticism. The scepticism was to break out like an eruption after Dr. Balfour had gone to his rest. We have pictures of the old man from many pens, but chiefly from the pen of his famous grandson, who was in all respects so unlike him. To-day he gazes at us from his portrait with quiet eyes, expressive of old-world peace and tranquillity, set in a face unmistakably declaring nationality. It is a shrewd, kindly face, not strong, not imaginative, scarcely intellectual, but beaming softly with innate goodness and a desire to be on friendly terms with his fellow-men. As a pastor he was zealous, benevolent, respected, and believing, like Goldsmith's vicar, in population, became the father of a numerous family—a baker's dozen of thirteen, to be precise. His wife, who introduced the foreign blood, is described as a woman of singular charm and beauty. The charm she transmitted in large measure to her grandson; the good looks she did not; for Louis was never an Adonis.

In that sequestered manse tucked away, as it were, from the fret and fever of active life, were born and grew up, as Stevenson says, "a family of stalwart sons and tall daughters." Wooers found their way thither, among them Thomas Stevenson, the young lighthouse engineer, who might be expected to be rather a practical than a fervid or romantic lover. His solid qualities found favour at Colinton Manse and in 1848, when he was thirty, he married Margaret Isabella, the youngest daughter of the Rev. Lewis and Mrs. Balfour. Her brother, Dr. George W. Balfour, "that wise youth, my uncle," to whom (with others) *Underwoods* is dedicated, describes her as "tall, slender, singularly graceful, brilliantly fair in complexion,

and known throughout the parish as ' the Minister's white-headed lassie.' "

At the time of her marriage she was nineteen, the golden age of romance.

## CHAPTER II

### THE CHILD

Thomas Stevenson carried his girl-bride to No. 8 Howard Place, Edinburgh, a modestly substantial, compact, middle-class residence of the time, standing on the northern skirts of the New Town. To-day commerce has invaded and enclosed it; but then it stood on the edge of the country with a wide, open, northward view, and an air that had something both of the purity and the bleakness of the mountains. There on the 13th of November 1850 was born the son and only child of the marriage. He was baptised Robert Lewis Balfour—Robert for the lighthouse engineer, Lewis Balfour for the Colinton minister. The subsequent change from "Lewis" to "Louis" is a piquant revelation of the paternal psychology, or more pointedly of the force and aggressiveness of the paternal prejudices.

Thomas Stevenson, as has been indicated, was "a stern and unbending Tory," obstinately and most loyally blind to the virtues of any party but his own. It chanced that there was then in Edinburgh as "stern and unbending" a Liberal also named Lewis. The outraged descendant of Westland Whigs would have no association even in name with the latter-day Radical, who supported William Ewart Gladstone and his anti-Tory gang

His child's name must be changed. So "Lewis" was transformed into the "Louis" with which the world is familiar. For sake of brevity "Balfour" was dropped, and Mrs. Stevenson regretted an omission which seemed to cut off the entire Balfour connection, but dutifully acquiesced. In those semi-feudal, mid-Victorian days it was the part of wives and mothers to acquiesce in the desires, decisions, and prejudices of their menfolk. Besides, the young husband had a masterful way with him and was not easily opposed.

In 1853 the family "flitted" to 1 Inverleith Terrace,[1] close by, and again, four years later, to 17 Heriot Row, which was henceforth to be the home of Robert Louis Stevenson while he remained in his native city. By his association with it Heriot Row has acquired universal fame and must frequently recur in this narrative. All three houses stand in the same northern quarter of what is called the New Town.

The home into which an inscrutable Fate, as by a stroke of irony, sent a son of the Muses was in essence the fine flower of Scots Calvinism. On both sides there was an immediate heritage of piety; it is curious indeed how constant a factor piety is in the Stevenson–Balfour records. The ultra-pious Jean Smith, nursed and nurtured in the faith by the ultra-pious Jean Lillie; the devout and exemplary Lewis Balfour, a bulwark of Scots orthodoxy, each contributed a living and pervasive influence. What lay behind the dual inheritance of godliness, the wild, lawless inheritance from the remote and

[1] Recently the house No. 8 Howard Place was purchased by public subscription as a perpetual memorial of Edinburgh's gifted son, and will soon be available as a Stevenson Museum.

romantic past, was so deeply in abeyance it did not appear to exist.

Both father and mother were shining examples of the virtues and graces (and virtue and grace are not always in union) which most readily procure esteem and affection. They have been described to me again and again by people who knew them intimately ; and never once has a derogatory word or hint been mingled with the praise. Detesting Nonconformity almost as a crime against God and nature they were in their own walk and conduct exemplars of orthodoxy, social and religious. They were in fact eminently, pre-eminently respectable. Later, as we shall see, their son denounced respectability as a soul-destroying poison, and their grief was agony. But in his childhood there was nothing to disturb the smooth flow of convention and conformity which make ordinary people respected and happy.

Thomas Stevenson, while dowered with all the characteristic Scots dourness and doggedness, had rather more than the average Scots tenderness of heart underlying and belying the hard exterior. Deep down in his nature there was an abyss of gloom which occasionally found expression in surprising exhibitions of self-distrust and sentimentality. Like Hamlet, he was apt to be oppressed by " the heavy and the weary weight of all this unintelligible world." Yet in affairs he was forceful, practical, successful, with a passion for work, and tastes and sympathies far beyond the bounds of his profession.

Mrs. Stevenson was a complete, in some respects a piquant contrast, tempering his sadness with her gaiety, his constitutional despondency with a blitheness of spirit which shook off trouble as a bird

shakes water from its wings. To the end she was the light-hearted lassie of Colinton Manse, smiling, buoyant, graceful, defying care, or at any rate meeting and surmounting it with a gay courage that was infectious and exhilarating. She was never known to frown, and when trouble came she bore herself, at least to outsiders, as if it did not exist. Mrs. Dale of Scoughal, North Berwick, who knew her better than anyone else now alive, writes to me in this connection.

"As to Louis's mother one cannot say too much of her gentle graciousness and sweetness in much delicacy of health; but along with it all much capability and character. She was generally termed 'the angel of the family' by all its many members, and poured oil on any troubled waters there might be. It is always a satisfaction to me that on the day before R. L. S. died he gave the annual feast of 'Thanksgiving Day' to hold which always appealed much to his feelings, and to which he invited a large company of friends and neighbours. He stood up at the end of his table and began to enumerate some of the many mercies for which he had to be thankful, and 'the first and foremost' was the presence beside him of his beloved mother. That was her due; for she was entirely selfless, never, in fact, thought of herself at all, and only lived to shed happiness around her. I can see her now, at the writing-table in the east-most of the three windows of her sunny drawing-room at 17 Heriot Row, overlooking the pretty gardens with the round pond and ducks on it."

It was from her, not from his father, that Louis inherited the buoyancy and resilience of temperament which have roused the interest and wonder of the world. Mrs. Dale adds: "Mr. Stevenson

senior much enjoyed walks along this seashore of Scoughall, and my husband followed his suggestion of allowing the large boulders to lie around instead of building them up with much labour into a sea-wall as a protection against the incursion of the waters, as had always been done, with little effect."

The characters and dispositions of both husband and wife will appear more fully as we proceed.

From the first Louis was a household idol, at any rate with its womenfolk. He was delicate and he occupied the throne alone, in the character of a despot. He did not escape the perils and consequences of the position. Many years later, when Fate was trying him as with fire, he referred to himself half-remorsefully as a spoiled child. Spoiled he was in the sense that he was the object of a boundless devotion and adoration, the little sun round which the domestic world revolved. To this fact is attributable, at least in part, the early and intensive development of the inordinate, ubiquitous egotism which to some tastes disfigures both his character and his writings. To others, of course, the egotism is an added charm.

## Cummy: "My Second Mother," and Her Mission

His mother was herself delicate, often, indeed, gravely ill, and in order that her son, the sole hope and pride of the family, should lack nothing, a helper and ally was introduced. This was Alison Cunningham, "the angel of my infant life" of *A Child's Garden of Verses*. She came on the scene a mature woman, and survived "her boy" by

nearly twenty years, her death occurring as lately as 1913 in her ninety-second year. In the Stevenson household she was " Cummy," a childish corruption of Cunningham, and he was " Smout," a pet name not very happily bestowed by his father. In the vernacular it signifies " small fry."

In those days the mutual, semi-feudal attachment of employer and employed had not been swept away as a ridiculous anachronism by triumphant democracy. Cummy was a hireling, but she was also a cherished and loyal member of the family. Its interests were her interests ; its welfare her welfare. Her devotion to her charge was literally that of a " Second Mother," as he affectionately called her. She lived for him, even, it is said, declining an eligible offer of marriage rather than desert her little Lou. Whether in these enlightened, independent days any successor could be found so fondly foolish may be doubted.

Cummy harmonised ideally with her environment and the family tradition. She too *was deeply* pious, with a piety compounded in equal parts of fervent religion and gross superstition, of the fear of God and a living belief in the actuality and activity of the devil. A Covenanter in the bone, she stood for her faith with all the grim, fierce fidelity of her grim, fierce forefathers. In all likelihood some of them were at Drumclog, Bothwell Brig, Rullion Green, or other fields made glorious by martyrdom, and faced Claverhouse and his dragoons, not without inflicting casualties. For her as for them the Bible was God's own word, full of menace, dark with the terrors of damnation, but happily, also, an infallible warrant for taking vengeance on enemies.

Into her hands Louis was delivered at the tender age of eighteen months, and she became teacher and nurse in one. There can be no doubt that her influence was profound and formative, and that certain qualities and tendencies even in Stevenson's latest work may be traced back to Cummy and her teaching in the nursery at 17 Heriot Row. From her came the first unperceived impulse which was to carry him so far from the ways of his fathers and the courses she could not in her heart have approved, for to the Covenanting conscience fiction is anathema and of the devil. Yet affection conquered prejudice, and to the end Cummy continued as she began, treasuring her boy's books, letters, photographs, and most dearly of all his baby caps and childish dresses made by her own hand. At her death a considerable collection of Stevenson relics were sold and are now scattered in various collections at home and abroad.

Her first care was his health; her next his religious and moral education. Very early she instructed him in the Bible, reading aloud to him in particular the stories and battle pieces of the Old Testament. Close upon the Bible came the Shorter Catechism; then followed such works as *The Pilgrim's Progress*, *A Cloud of Witnesses*, *The Saint's Everlasting Rest*, Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, and *The Remains of Robert Murray McCheyne*, the noble, the gifted who died young, leaving a memory that is still fragrant in many a Scottish home.[1] The lights of the Covenant, Wodrow, Peden, and the rest, had an honoured place in the curriculum. From these fiery sectaries Stevenson, on a half-

[1] It is interesting to recall that McCheyne's book, of which Stevenson in his maturity spoke disparagingly, was a favourite with General Gordon, and helped to sustain and comfort him in the black hours just before the end at Khartoum.

jesting reference by himself, is thought to have derived his style, a theory which the credulous may accept if they so please. At least equally important for the future novelist, Cummy was an overflowing treasury of ghost, goblin, witch, warlock, spunky, and fairy stories, which she told him with the curdling realism that comes of wholehearted belief. Burns, it will be remembered, had similar advantages of education at the hands of " an old woman remarkable for her ignorance, credulity, and superstition."

One valuable accomplishment Cummy had, oftener found in French nurseries than in British —she read aloud with admirable feeling and appreciation. Long afterwards Stevenson called her reading " dramatic." When he was ill, as he mostly was in winter months, when a hacking cough and feverish restlessness made sleep impossible, the devoted Cummy whiled away the tedium of the long night hours with select readings from the Old Testament. The stories of Joseph and his brethren, of Saul and David and Jonathan, of Moses and Miriam, of numberless kings, warriors, and battles, how many young, ardent imaginations have they not fascinated and fired! Little Lou, listening enthralled, forgot his cough, forgot his fever, his restlessness and begged for more and ever more. Before he was able to read for himself, his nurse, it is believed, had read the greater part of the Bible aloud to him three times. Byron, too, had a nurse who told him stories and legends and drilled him in Bible knowledge. " Don't forget this," he wrote to his publisher, John Murray, when he was famous, " that I am a great reader and admirer of those books, and had read them through and through before I was eight years old, that is to

say the Old Testament ; for the New struck me as a task, but the other as a pleasure." To that pleasure he owned himself indebted for his directness and vividness of style ; and, indeed, there has probably been no British writer of eminence during the last three hundred years who did or would not own a similar indebtedness. There, at any rate, Stevenson's education was excellent and superexcellent, though it must be admitted his mature work shows few traces of Biblical influences.

The " bogle-stories " bore more permanent, or at any rate more clearly perceptible, fruit. " Thrawn Janet," the best of Stevenson's short stories, in the opinion of many good judges the best story short or long he ever wrote, is exactly in Cummy's most authentic manner. He believed while he wrote, even as she believed while she recited ; and the result is a little masterpiece of gruesome Scots superstition, not unworthy to stand beside that other little masterpiece " Wandering Willie's Tale " in *Redgauntlet*.

Too much, however, must not be made of Cummy's ghostly recitals. The stories with which she made Lou's flesh creep were and are a common possession. All over the land other nurses and innumerable mothers were telling similar tales to similarly-enchanted little listeners. " Tell me a story " is a nursery request familiar in every age and every clime ; for the love of story-telling is as old and as universal as the race.

Cummy told stories that made the blood run cold and the hair rise on the scalp of her solitary auditor, but, as I have indicated, her real function was to ground him in moral and religious principles, that is, to make him a good Covenanter. Temporarily, at least, she succeeded with a completeness that

must have filled her pious heart with joy. The immediate effect of her teaching was to develop in him a precocious and impressive gift for prayer, and the recitation of hymns and passages from Scripture. " That I was eminently religious there can be no doubt," he remarks later, when religion was not a burning question with him.[1] In infant years, however, the fear of hell was terribly upon him, for Cummy made the fate of the wicked appallingly real. In the dark or when tempests raged, threatening to blow in windows and carry off chimney-stacks, he was abjectly pious ; when daylight and peace returned, showing that the world still continued its course apparently undamaged, the piety merged and faded into something less austere and trying. " As the sun is up again we may lay aside the Bible, Cummy," he would remark, with a gleam of joy. " Now take down that Ballantyne from the shelf."[2]

Once or twice when left alone (a rare occurrence) he could be heard praying with desperate unction, and some extempore devotional utterances taken down by his father while hearkening outside his bedroom door were long preserved. They suggest the first symptoms of the hysteria which underlay so much of his mature work and finds expression in his correspondence, especially in the large sections which still remain unpublished. Whether the celebrated *Vailima Prayers* are in any sense a harking-back to those early memories of Cummy and her teaching can only be a matter of surmise ;

1 " I was lovingly but not always wisely treated, the great fault being Cummy's overhaste to make me a religious pattern. . . . Had I died in these years I fancy I might perhaps have figured in a tract." (Fragment of Autobiography.)

2 Ballantyne was the first author whom Stevenson saw in the flesh— " An exceedingly good-looking, dark, full-bearded man."

certainly during the last days in Samoa the exile's thoughts reverted fondly to 17 Heriot Row and all who had taught and watched over him so devotedly there.

His childish zeal for religion had almost a Covenanting fury. That he might preach from the pregnant and awful texts supplied by Cummy he built himself a toy church. "He makes a pulpit with a stool and chair," notes his mother in a record she kept of his childish sayings and doings. "Reads sitting, and then standing up sings by turns." Here, perhaps, is the germ of that disease of preaching which critics sometimes find a blemish in his writings. The same charge, however, has been brought against Scott, Thackeray, Dickens, and Victor Hugo, and might with equal justice be brought against every writer of genius from Homer down.

To Cummy also he owed the inspiration which produced his first essay in authorship, "A History of Moses," with illustrations by the author which showed the Israelites swaggering in top-hats and enjoying immense cigars. The historian was aged six. That precociously-ambitious work was dictated to his mother on five consecutive Sundays in competition for a prize of £1 offered by his uncle, David Stevenson. Lou did not come in first, but the award of a consolation prize so exhilarated him that, as he tells in one of his many confessions, "from that time forward it was the desire of my heart to be an author." A "History of Joseph," designed on the same lines and doubtless the result of the same inspiration, followed soon.

Much has been made of those childish efforts as something unique in literary history; but such precocity is by no means unparalleled. When he

was six Mrs. Cockburn described the young Walter Scott as a " most astounding genius of a boy." At seven Macaulay wrote a " Compendium of Universal History," at eight an essay intended to convert the heathen of Travancour to the Christian religion. About the same age he produced " The Battle of Cheviot " in imitation of " Marmion," and a little later an heroic poem called "Olaus the Great; or, the Conquest of Mona," with part at least of an epic in twelve books, besides many hymns which Hannah More thought " quite extraordinary for such a baby." Those infantile productions, however, were not handed round for general admiration.

These examples (and others that might be cited) are interesting as showing how " coming events cast their shadows before." But it would have been better for Stevenson, better, perhaps, for literature, had he been sent out with a hoop and thrust into rough-and-tumble contact with other boys. In his boyhood he never did undergo the common rough-and-tumble experiences which are so hard yet so effective a part of a boy's education. From the first he was a hothouse plant, sheltered, protected lest " the winds of heaven should visit his face too roughly." His delicacy was made yet more delicate by coddling, for there was the ever-present fear that attends the only child in a well-to-do household that risks, such as normal boys take naturally, might have disastrous results. The possessor of a single jewel is apt to be fussily anxious about its safety.

When reading and ghost-stories palled, the devoted Cummy would lift her small charge to the window wrapped in blanket or shawl, and let him gaze on the wonder-world without. Thus in the

dawn he often watched the carts rumbling cityward from the country, his peaked white face pressed hard against the pane in his eagerness to see men and horses. In the evenings he watched the lights springing up in other windows, and wondered if other children were caged prisoners like himself. The appearance of the lamplighter had almost the excitement of a raid by pirate or highwayman. Thanks to the re-creating power of genius, we can still behold in all its pathetic reality that pale, tiny figure with the expectant, wistful face watching from an upper window of 17 Heriot Row. He is gone, Cummy is gone : all who made home for him are gone ; but the picture remains a joy that touches the heart of innumerable multitudes in many lands. As long as the poetry of childhood endures—and childhood is a perpetual poem—so long will enchanted readers see in their mind's eye the little Lou looking forth from his window full of eagerness, full of plans and romantic aspirations for the future.

> But I, when I am stronger and can choose what I'm to do,
> O, Learie, I'll go round at night and light the lamps with you.

Meanwhile there was the childish longing for notice, were it only a silent greeting.

> And O, before you hurry by with ladder and with light,
> O, Learie, see a little child and nod to him to-night.

The yearning of imaginative, imprisoned childhood has perhaps never been more truly or exquisitely expressed, not even by Victor Hugo, the supreme master of child psychology.

For months together, when winters were severe—as Edinburgh winters usually are—or the cough was troublesome, Lou was not once across the domestic threshold. In the long and tedious

imprisonment his mother occasionally relieved Cummy as nurse, but rather to observe and admire than to teach. What Lou did, what he said, how he said it, how he looked, these were the staple of her observations, and she filled a little book with the record, which she kept till her death. It is touching and lovely, but happily for our country it is the sort of record which might be duplicated in almost any middle-class home where mothers have leisure to play Boswell to their children.

Propped up in bed, or on the floor beside her, Lou amused himself in the manner of his age. Sometimes his cousin " Bob " Stevenson came in, and they fought mimic battles with tin soldiers or built castles and fortresses with toy bricks which were no sooner built than they were demolished. That childish taste for building with toy bricks Stevenson carried into manhood. A lady, still alive, whose home he visited, when she was ten and he was four-and-twenty, complained archly that he commandeered her building material to build for his own amusement. Another favourite pastime was to lie on the floor face down with large sheets of paper and draw staggering pictures from imagination. Once looking up from such an exercise, he remarked gravely: " Mamma, I have drawed a man. Shall I draw his soul too ? " a question which the devout fondly interpret as prophetic.

Though almost destitute of talent for the art, he retained a lifelong love of drawing. I have lately examined some pencil sketches done by him in later years, some gently caricaturing himself, others illustrating scenes from his books or depicting bits of scenery that chanced to strike his fancy. One done from memory in Samoa is a drawing of

Swanston hamlet showing in the foreground the thatched cottage of John Todd, the Pentland shepherd, familiar to all readers of the Essays. Artistically the sketches are nothing ; but the last at any rate is significant as evidence of how the exile's heart turned to the scenes and companions of youth.

All through his childhood Lou enjoyed the licence of an autocrat, doing what he would, getting what he wished without question, if the resources of Heriot Row could procure it for him. Breeding as well as blood will out. As Louis began by having all his desires gratified, so later, as we shall find, he did what he wished to do, took what he wished to have as if it were his sovereign right to please himself. " If he wanted a thing," wrote Henley, in passing final judgment on his old comrade, " he went after it with an entire contempt for consequences."

He was not always a prisoner of health and weather, neither was he always a hero to those about him. When he walked out with Cummy, prim, girlish, guarded, wearing, it might be, a pelisse of her own making, the sight provoked bursts of derision from other boys. " Hauf a laddie, hauf a lassie, hauf a yellow yite," yelled the juvenile mockers, following Cummy and her charge. Lou made no attempt to retaliate ; but from those childish affronts may be dated the origin of his dislike of Edinburgh and its people which was to manifest itself with so much bitterness later. Children have long memories, and to the end those jeering voices rang in Stevenson's ears. Time and distance softened them, but they were never forgotten.

More pleasant were the experiments in sailing paper boats on a pond near 17 Heriot Row, the

visits to picturesque spots close at hand, and especially the raids upon toy-shops, where Lou, ever attended by the faithful Cummy, must have been a much-appreciated customer. Once in an access of piety and affection he presented Cummy with a Bible, having first borrowed the money for the purchase from herself. When he began to associate a little more with boys (the association was never close) there were games in Princes Street Gardens, or, better still, "military manœuvres" carried out in a brave Cromwellian spirit on the green slope under the Castle walls. Sometimes, like his great predecessor, he tried to climb the "kittle nine stanes" which "project high in the air from the precipitous black granite of the Castle-rock." More in the spirit of elfish mischief, he joined in organised excursions into neighbouring districts, where the excursionists indulged in an orgy of ringing door-bells and running from irate citizens.

At times the sport was varied by the invasion of gardens in the character of ferocious bandits. Once when by himself in a western suburb Louis came upon a shuttered house, the family being absent on holiday. His head at that time was seething with the glorious exploits of pirates and robbers. Here was a chance to emulate them! In a jiffey Louis was over the garden-wall and picking an entrance through a back window. But no sooner was he inside the house than a noise, taken to indicate the presence of a policeman, sent him scurrying under a bed, where he lay for two hours in a sweat of mortal terror. At last he ventured to creep out, found the coast clear, and made a bolt for home, quite definitely cured of all ambition to be a burglar. Asked once, when he was famous, what kind of a



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boy Louis had been, Cummy answered succinctly: "Just like other bairns, whiles very naughty." The judgment on the whole sums him up accurately.

At six he was already an enthusiastic patron of the drama as exemplified in the toy-theatre. For that taste he jestingly asserted in manhood that Cummy was responsible. "You know very well, Cummy," he said, "how you acted those stories you told me just as if you had seen them yourself"; a statement she was wont to repeat with the delighted comment: "Think of Lou saying that to me when I was never in a theatre all my days!"

The tastes for such joys persisted as described with reminiscent fondness in the sketch *A Penny Plain and Twopence Coloured*, written when he had reached his thirty-fourth year. In gratifying his passion for lurid melodrama he spent most of his spare coppers in that stationer's shop kept by one Smith, at the corner of Leith Walk and Antigua Street, made famous by his boyish visits. When his pockets were empty, as happened with distressing frequency, he stared with gloating eagerness at the tiny but splendid theatre within, set alluringly with scenes showing a forest, a combat, and a company of jolly, carousing robbers. "Long and often," confessed the grown man, "I lingered there with empty pockets . . . That shop," he added, "which was dark and smelled of Bibles, was a load-stone rock for all that bore the name of boy." In the literature of the drama his particular favourites were *Three-fingered Jack* and *The Miller and His Men*, a taste which did not at all belie the exquisite artist that was to be.

## Golden Days at Colinton Manse

One spot for ever associated with the name and fame of Stevenson was a haven of delight to him in his childhood, his mother's old home, Colinton Manse, some three miles south-west of Edinburgh. Until he was ten he spent much of his time there, and he has left more than one idealised picture of the Manse and its surroundings. Both have changed much since he knew them. Fashion has laid its gaudy, some might say its vandal, hand upon the village of Colinton, and from the heights behind pretentious villas of pseudo-antique patterns look down on the Manse, as in disdain of its sequestered lowliness.

Since the time of the Rev. Lewis Balfour, D.D., the house itself has undergone alteration and enlargement ; but it retains much of its old character. As I saw the scene in its fresh spring greenery on a beautiful afternoon of early May, Manse, grounds, garden, heights, and woods made a memorable picture of loveliness. The Water of Leith flows past as of old, singing a crooning gurgling song as it goes, though the mill " with the humming of thunder " and " the weir with the Wonder of foam " of *A Child's Garden of Verses* are gone. But the water-gate is still there inviting the visitor to follow where Louis so often went. Opening it, I dropped down some three feet and stood on the rocks below, which were once fields of adventure to him and his trooping companions.

> Dark brown is the river
> Golden is the sand.

The golden sand is all gone, swept away by spring

or winter floods, but the brown water, with its suggestions of Highland burns, comes tumbling and racing down among its boulders and rocks with the old, old monotone, musically clear and soothing, or swirling and eddying in black pools below. It is now much cleaner, I am informed, than it was in Louis's time, the mills, three in number, having ceased their work and their pollutions. The stream—it is scarcely a river—is to-day stocked with trout, and the angler may be seen casting his fly from its tangled banks.

The Manse, peeping from its " bouquet " of trees, faces the wooded acclivity across the water. " The woods rose like walls into the sky," Stevenson wrote. To the adult eye his description exaggerates the steepness, though it may well have seemed wall-like to the eyes of the city child and in recollection to the man. The lawn, still, as I saw it, " a perfect goblet of sunshine " rich in shrubbery and smooth as the proverbial velvet, ends in a walled bank above coiling, encircling water. Rearward yews flank the Manse, and to the right is the ancient churchyard where " the rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep," among them the Rev. Lewis Balfour. Hard by the churchyard wall is the old yew, " one of the glories of the village," and from its gnarled boughs dangles a swing just as in the time of Louis. Under the tree's widespread shade, where it was " dark and cool " even in the blaze of summer, little Louis and his many cousins romped and shouted.

> " And I can hear them call and say
> *How far is it to Babylon?* "—

he sang long afterwards, fondly recalling that golden time. Standing on the well-trodden spot within

the yew-tree's shade, I almost fancied I could hear those gleeful young voices and see Louis's elfish face and bright-brown eyes alight with mischief.

The Manse as he knew it was "a nest of small rooms," odd corners, and draughty passages, as so many old Manses were and are, and therefore an ideal place for play. The garden, thriftily rich in fruit-tree, gooseberry and currant bush, with winding paths that lost themselves in blossomy thickets of lilac and laurel, was more a wonderland than the forest of Arden. There Louis played "tig" or hide-and-seek, or stalked Red Indians with contingents of the numerous cousins, some fifty in all, who from time to time shared his sport. Sometimes, too, in the gloaming they stole with bated breath along "the witches' walk" under the haunted kirkyard wall eerily expecting to encounter an apparition. To-day visitors sauntering in those yew-dimmed alleys, as dusk slowly darkens the glade, almost expect to catch glimpses of a boyish sprite flitting elusively into the gloom, a phantom yet familiar figure from the vanished past.

Indeed, by his unifying magic, past and present blend and become one, so that admiring readers coming from the ends of the earth to do homage find him still dominating, possessing the lovely and secluded scene. From every nook and corner, from every bushy cluster and turn of path, his antic spirit seems to leap.[1]

In summer, when the woods are heavy with foliage and the roses are in bloom, the place seems like a foretaste of paradise; but in the sluicing rains of autumn and winter it becomes oozy, soggy, and

[1] It should be stated that the present incumbent, the Rev. Mr. Marjoribanks, does his utmost to continue the Stevenson tradition, and that visitors owe much to his unfailing courtesy, knowledge, and enthusiasm.

depressing. Lying deep in the bottom of what is in reality a miniature ravine, hemmed in by wood and height and water, the Manse was thought to be an ill place for health. Dr. Balfour, however, stoutly maintained that the notion was entirely wrong. "I have spent a goodly part of eighty years in this Manse," he said, "and have always enjoyed good health; and when my children ail they always come back to recruit." He, indeed, lived to a patriarchal age in that dank spot, and that notwithstanding an early weakness of the lungs which seemed to indicate a phthisical tendency.

All the same, there can be little question that it left its mark on the constitution of his youngest daughter and consequently on that of her son. For all his delight in the place, Stevenson himself confessed that during the greater part of the year it was sunless, and that the butter-bur, the hemlock, and the nettle abounded in its gloomy recesses. He mentions "the gloom of the black, slow water, of the strange wet smell of the draggled vegetation," conditions scarcely conducive to the health of a young family, especially with inherited tendencies to disease. And, in fact, it seems clear that the seeds of Stevenson's lifelong disease were sown or developed prenatally in the dankness and decay around Colinton Manse.

Yet his memories of it were wholly charming. "Out of my reminiscences of life in that dear place," he wrote long after it had ceased to be his second home, "all the morbid and painful elements have disappeared. That was my golden age; *et ego in arcadia vixi*." His golden age ended when he was ten, that is, when his grandfather died and, as he says, another race inhabited the Manse.

There were other delights at Colinton Manse, less exciting perhaps, but scarcely less sweet, than his rompings and play-actings with his brigade of cousins. In these his chief ally was Miss Jane Balfour, the " Aunt Jane " of his reminiscences. Mrs. Lewis Balfour had died in 1844, six years before Louis's birth, and the household duties then devolved upon her eldest unmarried daughter. Miss Balfour was a woman of large heart, much force of character, and a genial disposition that made her the idol of her troop of nephews and nieces. In her youth, Stevenson informs us, she was " a wit and a beauty, very imperious, managing, and self-sufficient." A horseback accident injured her so seriously that it left her nearly deaf and blind, but it could not destroy her sweetness of temper nor her energetic practical capacity for management. At her hands Louis consumed immense quantities of " Albert biscuits and calf-foot jelly," and otherwise enjoyed the privileges of a favourite.

But in the midst of sport and feasting he did not forget his ambition to be an author. At Colinton Manse he dictated a whole series of " bungling adaptions from Mayne Reid " and others, which he or someone else had the good sense to burn. Inevitably they were boyish effusions, written in slavish imitation of the authors he was beginning to admire. It was to be a long time before he could rid himself of the shackles of imitation, if, indeed, he ever quite succeeded.

## CHAPTER III

### THE TRUANT SCHOOLBOY

The school records of illustrious men seldom foreshadow the greatness that is to come. Nor is the fact surprising. The routine of education is designed not for the embryonic genius who is mostly independent of it, but for the average intelligence which in the fullness of time produces the average citizen. The world is a world of averages, planed down to a uniform docile mediocrity of talent, ambition, and achievement. Hence budding originality, moved by a secret power to incessant war with the commonplace and conventional, is apt to be indifferent, perverse, or downright recalcitrant in scholastic traces. The position is rarely ameliorated by pedagogues who are not commonly prophets able to perceive in present failure or contempt the earnest of future glory. A discerning dominie told the young Walter Scott that "a dunce he was and a dunce he would remain," a clear-sighted judgment that may account for the lifelong contempt in which the genial author of "Waverley" held the whole race of schoolmasters. "That schoolmaster deserves to be beaten himself who beats nature in a boy for a fault," remarks shrewd old Fuller, and he adds, "Many boys are muddy-headed till they be clarified with age, and such afterwards prove the best."

Scott's literary successor in "the ancient and famous Capital of the North" escaped the title of dunce only by evading the tests of the classroom. With Louis Stevenson, indeed, there could be no classroom triumphs; for his education resolved itself into a series of haphazard experiments, abandoned almost as soon as begun. You may call it a gipsy education, and yet, so cunningly does Destiny lay her designs, that for the gipsy-like Robert Louis Stevenson it was probably the very best conceivable.

He began conventionally enough in his seventh year in a tiny school at Cannonmills, close to his home.[1] Thence after a brief stay he passed to a Mr. Henderson, who kept a small preparatory school in India Street, also close to Heriot Row. There he appears to have inaugurated the game of truantry, which later he was to develop into a consistent and much-bewritten system. There, too, began the real spells of ill-health which were to continue intermittently for the rest of his life. From the first, study seems to have been the last thought either of the pupil or his severely-practical father. Thomas Stevenson's attitude in the matter of education is one of the curiosities of psychology. It is said that when he met schoolboys in the street with bulging satchels he would stop them, gravely point out the folly of book-learning, and advise them to ignore "lessons" and read just what pleased them. That had been his own plan, and, like the professor satirised by Goldsmith, he was perfectly satisfied with the result. Louis obeyed the paternal precepts to the letter. He

[1] It has been stated to me that for some months in his fifth or sixth year he attended Free St. Mary's School, but I have been unable to verify the statement.

learned to read ; that done, he followed his own tastes with consequences which his father was to find disconcerting almost to the point of tragedy.

At the age of eleven he entered the Academy, where he remained a sedulously idle and irregular pupil for eighteen months. Some of his schoolmates, who still happily survive, have given me their candid impressions and recollections of him as an Academy boy. They recall him as the oddity of the school, not so much delicate or fragile as frankly, irredeemably bizarre. Inevitably he was the butt of such crude and cruel satire as boys alone know how to devise. The schoolmaster may chasten, but the average boy remains an ingrained savage. Louis was too tempting game to be neglected. Persistent efforts were made to goad him into retaliation ; but they failed. He simply would not turn on his tormentors. In school life, and in Scottish schools more than in English, a pair of hard, handy fists is an asset which inspires profound respect, as skill in " the noble art " is a source of great glory. No insult, no provocation could make Louis double a fist either in revenge or self-defence.

The normal boy is always a pugilist at heart, a potential lover and patron of the ring. Louis was not normal, and at school was never the hero of any of those sanguinary encounters which sober men love to recall as forbidden joys of boyhood. He never took a bully aside into a quiet corner of the playground, or behind a screening dyke, and there settled accounts in the midst of a circle of urchins, yelling and betting on the result. In a city of snows, snowball fights were an honoured pastime. Louis avoided them with more than the sedulity of a girl. He played no games. Football was

beyond him, cricket did not interest him. To crown all his strangeness, he was already beginning to display "queer Frenchified" airs. A little earlier, as we saw, the mocking cry was "Hauf a laddie, hauf a lassie, hauf a yellow yite." Now the chosen epithets were "daft" and "daftie," varied by the half-pitying, half-contemptuous "softie." At no period of his career was Stevenson supersensitive. He never felt a slight or a sting as Thackeray, for example, felt it. All the same, those galling experiences of his boyhood made him acutely miserable, and he remembered them with bitterness.

The Academy is an excellent school, with a long record of successes—judges, advocates, clergymen, doctors, schoolmasters, and civil servants. It failed utterly to make a scholar of Louis Stevenson, though his principal teacher was D'Arcy Thompson a noted Grecian in his day who subsequently rose to a professor's chair. Mr. Thompson was a man of ideas and ideals, with a genuine interest in the human side of his profession, and as genuine a talent for literature. His delightful little book, *The Day Dreams of a Schoolmaster*, may still be read with pleasure and profit for its wit, its wisdom, its freshness, originality, and luminous good sense. It opens with the date October 10, 1863. Louis had just left the Academy, carrying away, it may be, that love of Horace which he mentioned with pride in later years. He refers to his old teacher as "the delightful D'Arcy Thompson," a compliment which at least indicates some measure of mutual understanding. For the rest the school left no impress upon him.[1]

[1] At the Academy he edited a school magazine, to which he was himself a voluminous contributor.

His next venture, occasioned primarily by the illness and absence of his mother, was an English boarding-school at Spring Grove, Isleworth, near London. There, however, despite the wild excitement of sardine suppers on the sly, he was so utterly miserable that a single term sufficed. Rescued and taken back to Edinburgh, after pathetic appeals to his father, he passed to the care of one Robert Thomson, whose little seminary for backward boys in Frederick Street was well known in its day. A fellow-pupil, the late H. B. Baildon, wrote a book on his old schoolmate with reminiscences, impressions, and so-called criticisms. The good Baildon is immensely enthusiastic ; would he were equally illuminative. His recollections, recorded late and recovered, as appears, from the baffling haze of a memory that was clearly defective, are tantalisingly vague, on some points demonstrably inaccurate. Nor are his critical judgments impartial or convincing. To exalt Stevenson he disparaged George Meredith and Thomas Hardy, an amateurish method which will scarcely appeal to enlightened readers.

As remembered, obviously with some difficulty, by Mr. Baildon, Louis was " a quick and bright but somewhat desultory scholar," which is tantamount to saying he was " a lad o' pairts " bent on indulging his own tastes. There is mention of French, Latin, and Geometry as more or less congenial studies, with loose renderings of Ovid, which may be taken as a sort of aftermath of D'Arcy Thompson and the Academy. The real interest, however, lay in the school magazine, a manuscript periodical which, with the editorial extravagance of its kind, ran two serial stories simultaneously. One was written wholly by Louis ; the other he

wrote in collaboration with young Baildon. It is scarcely surprising to learn they were " blood-and-thunder tales " of the most lurid order, with pirates, bandits, and kindred gentry reeking of gore. To the last Stevenson retained that taste for blood. Baildon père, an Edinburgh druggist and chemist by trade, chancing to come on a specimen of the magazine, found its contents so " sensational " that he summarily prohibited collaboration, and Louis was left to carry on alone—his first real adventure in story-telling.

## Early Appearance

Physically Louis was then what he continued to be through life—angular, spidery, thin-armed, spindle-legged, narrow-chested with the stoop which comes of weak lungs and flaccid muscles. In colouring he was fair, like his mother, in childhood very fair, with twinkling brown eyes, set, as his portraits show, uncommonly wide apart. Some even of those who knew him personally have described him as black-haired and black-eyed, like Burns. The description is wholly wrong. I have examined a lock of his hair, cut in late childhood, and found it remarkably fine in texture and very fair—flaxen, in fact—the sort of hair that never could be black. In later years it became dark brown, as is usual with its kind. Brown eyes are seldom the eyes of genius, grey being the dominating colour, but brown hair, more frequently than any other, is the hair of genius. His brow was " oval and full," his mother's brow, indicating rather quickness of intelligence and nimbleness of fancy, than a rich, strong endowment of imagination.

And in truth it may be said that at no point of his career, at any rate until the very end, did Stevenson display the imaginative power and scope which distinguish the great masters of his craft. His face was long, later developing into what is loosely styled the " horse-face " type ; and in that respect it suggests a resemblance to the face of George Eliot. The " foreign look," which so greatly puzzled his contemporaries (a legacy, as we have seen, from France), was already beginning to attract notice and excite derision. As the years passed that foreign look increased, suggesting in some of the portraits a Flemish–Jewish blend. To himself in those days he was beyond all doubt ugly, and past all contradiction idle.

## Education by Travel

To supplement formal teaching then and afterwards Stevenson was helped by various tutors. But of hard systematic study there was and could be none, at any rate along prescribed academic lines. The household was almost constantly in the crisis of some illness. Now it was the mother who was ill ; now the son ; again both were ill together. At rare intervals it was the father. There had to be sudden flights for health ; the beginning, so far as Louis was concerned, of those long, desperate wanderings which were to end in far Samoa. An excursion in his twelfth year took him to London, the Isle of Wight, Stonehenge, and Homburg. Within a few months he was at Mentone with his mother, and thence followed a tour which included Genoa, Venice, Rome, Naples, and the Rhine. If travel be the ideal education,

few boys in Britain or elsewhere enjoyed such educational advantages as fell to the young Louis Stevenson. He does not, however, appear to have been greatly impressed by those early journeyings, though the Rhone and the Brenner Pass remained as vivid memories, the scenery of the latter being partly reproduced in his story " Will o' the Mill." Two springs were spent at Torquay, again with his mother. Nearer home there were delightful trips with his father on brief tours of lighthouse inspection, experiences which he did not fail to chronicle in the full assurance that whatever befell him must interest the world at large. Nor did he miscalculate.

When there was no longer a Balfour at Colinton Manse, the family, according to city custom, spent its summer holidays at the seaside, with variations of scene on the Scottish coast. In those intervals Louis bathed, " Crusoed," rowed on the Tweed—a magical river in the annals of Scottish romance—and experienced his first love-affair with a pretty North Berwick girl. It was not as passionate an attachment as Byron's for Mary Duff, but it revealed to the boy the springs of passion in himself, and was, so to speak, the harbinger of much that was to follow. Of the romantic scenery of North Berwick he has left many scattered descriptions, and of his amusements he gives a racy and detailed account in " The Lantern Bearers," written a quarter of a century later. Then as now North Berwick was given up to golf, but Louis steadfastly refused to join in the game. Years afterwards a bond of sympathy with Fleeming Jenkin was the refusal of both to handle a golf-club. There surely he was no Scot, certainly no true child of Edinburgh, which is golf-mad. During a stay at Peebles he learned to ride, uncouthly rather than gracefully.

Nor did he forget the great purpose of authorship ; for he satirised the good folk of Peebles in imitation of the *Book of Snobs* which he unearthed from an old volume of *Punch*. Afterwards he was greatly surprised to find that his model was " the great Mr. Thackeray." At Peebles he distinguished himself by fighting a duel. No blood was shed, for although the powder was real, the pistols were leadless.

## The Beginnings of Authorship

All these things were but diversions. His real work, his animating ambition became steadily more and more literary. While still a pupil at Thomson's Academy he not only indulged in imitations of Thackeray, but was on the trail of Scott with two Covenanting novels, inspired, it may be taken, by the inimitable Cummy. Neither has survived, and it may be presumed that, though probably more ambitious, they were neither better nor worse than hundreds of their kind produced by eager schoolboys. A libretto, bearing the suggestive title " The Baleful Potato," was also among those juvenile productions.

More important still, there came his first real essay in authorship, *The Pentland Rising : a Page of History*. First designed as a story, it was remodelled at his father's request and at his father's expense published anonymously, when he was sixteen. The edition consisted of a hundred copies and the price was fourpence per copy, the total cost being £3 15*s*. It bore the imprint of Andrew Elliot, the well-known bookseller, whose son and successor still carries on a successful business in

Princes Street.[1] Immediately on publication the tiny edition was "bought in" by Thomas Stevenson. It stands now in the collected edition of its author's works, and to students of literature is an interesting and illuminative example of the faltering, uncertain beginning of one whose name was to become a household word wherever the English language is read or spoken. The tiny booklet of twenty-two pages is a quaint mosaic of Covenanting quotations and juvenile conceits, revised, one is tempted to believe, by the masterful hand of Cummy.

## A Pattern of Idleness

From the seminary of Robert Thomson and a succession of miscellaneous tutors, Louis passed to Edinburgh University, surely as ill-equipped an entrant as ever entered its classic gates. Since Stevenson's day the system of University education in Scotland has been revolutionised. When he became a student there was no preliminary test of fitness, a fact which will explain some apparent anomalies to southern readers. Anyone, however ill prepared, could pay the matriculation fee, and by payment of other fees attend any class or classes he chose. Examinations, too, when they came were easy, almost elementary compared with those of to-day. It is reckoned that a Master of Arts of 1870 would find it hard to pass the present Preliminary, and indeed would not improbably fail. In fact, the Universities then did the work which

[1] As I write the news reaches me that in a London sale-room a copy sold by auction realised £42—or 2,520 times the original figure.

secondary schools do now; and it may be supposed did it less efficiently.

Nevertheless, Edinburgh University had at that time some distinguished, some illustrious names on its active official roll. Thomas Carlyle was Lord Rector, though his Rectorial address, probably the most famous in all the long annals of such addresses, was delivered a year before Stevenson entered, the year, in fact, which saw the publication and withdrawal of *The Pentland Rising*. The Chair of English was occupied by David Masson, Carlyle's intimate friend and the biographer of Milton. Curious readers will find an illuminative criticism of Masson's huge work in an essay by James Russel Lowell. Tait, the collaborator of Thomson, known to history as Lord Kelvin, was in the Chair of Natural Philosophy. Campbell Fraser taught Logic and Henry Calderwood Moral Philosophy. The occupant of the Latin Chair was William Young Sellar, author of *Roman Poets of the Republic* and other works which are still valued by scholars. In Greek there was the picturesque Blackie, who lectured indifferently on Homer and Egyptian Crocodiles, and appeared in Princes Street in the mixed glory of wide slouch hat and tartan plaid. The Professor of Mathematics was Philip Kelland, of whom his indifferent pupil has left a charming picture. Finally, and most important of all for Stevenson and for us, the Professor of Engineering was Fleeming Jenkin.

From such teachers an ardent student might learn all there was to be known in science and scholarship. But Stevenson was not an ardent student, at any rate along the lines of prescribed academic study. The English class, it might be thought, would have attracted him. In reality he

shunned it, on the principle, perhaps, that a mere biographer of Milton could have nothing to teach an aspiring critic and novelist. Two sessions with Mr. Sellar in the Latin class brought no visible result in learning, though there may well have lingered some memories of the reading and exposition of Horace and Virgil. For Greek the fee was paid; but in the Greek classroom Stevenson was consistently "conspicuous by his absence." At the end of the session it was desirable to procure, Scots fashion, a certificate of attendance. With delightful aplomb he applied for one. Blackie regarded him quizzically:

"I don't seem to remember your face," said the Professor.

"Probably not, sir," was the unabashed response, "but I hope that will not prevent you from giving me a certificate."

And humming a Highland air, Blackie wrote and signed the document as desired.

Professor Jenkin, with whom Stevenson was afterwards to come into such close relations, proved less accommodating. The experience as related by Stevenson himself in his *Memoir of Fleeming Jenkin* may conveniently be mentioned here. As a potential engineer Stevenson was supposed to attend the engineering class. As usual, however, performance lay rather in the breach than the observance of duty. To the self-sufficient student the professors were a joke. Fleeming Jenkin he regarded as "a particularly good joke, perhaps the broadest in the vast pleasantry of my curriculum." Gaily confident, he applied to Jenkin for a certificate. The professor eyed him sternly:

"It is quite useless for *you* to come to me, Mr. Stevenson," the applicant was told. "There may

be doubtful cases ; there is no doubt about yours. You simply have *not* attended my class."

Nonplussed but not repulsed, Stevenson argued, pleaded, and finally fell back on casuistry. Jenkin was unmoved.

" You are no fool," he said curtly, " and you chose your own course. To comply," he added severely, " would be to aid in a nefarious attempt to steal a degree."

He was persuaded, however, to examine certain other certificates, Blackie's doubtless among them, as evidence of work performed, and on them, perhaps less for the sake of the pupil than of his father, the engineer, the certificate was reluctantly given.

" I am still ashamed when I think of his shame in giving that paper," Stevenson confessed nearly twenty years later, in writing the biography of his friend. " He made no reproach in speech, but his manner was the more eloquent ; it told me plainly what a dirty business we were in, and I went from his presence, with my certificate indeed in my possession, but with no answerable sense of triumph. That was the beginning of my love for Fleeming Jenkin. I never thought lightly of him afterwards." The surprising thing is that he should ever have thought lightly of such a man. At that stage he could not have been a reader of character.

For Jenkin was probably the most remarkable personality then on the teaching staff of the University. Of Welsh origin or extraction, he had in reality what his flippant pupil sought and affected, genuine Celtic qualities. He was ardent and he was versatile, with gifts by no means superficial, for many things outside the bounds of

engineering. He was a Saturday Reviewer at a time when the *Saturday Review* was a power and a terror in the land. He corrected Munro, the most learned Latinist of his time, on Lucretius, and Darwin on the origin of species. He wrote on poets and actors with insight and originality, and in one elaborate essay on "Artist and Critic," a paper which should be reprinted in cheap form for popular reading, he gave brilliant proof of a faculty for literary criticism scarcely inferior to any of the time. He had a *flair* for the drama, and wrote at least one play—*Griselda*—which has real dramatic power. Of his scientific achievements his old pupil and assistant, Sir Alfred Ewing, the present distinguished Principal of Edinburgh University, Lord Kelvin, and others have written with enthusiastic appreciation.

All this implies an exceptional range of interest and accomplishment. But remarkable as were Jenkin's intellectual and imaginative endowments, his moral qualities were more remarkable still. His personality, despite the lack of tact with which his biographer charges him, was one of dominating power and charm. He radiated energy and joyousness, as from an inexhaustible store of both, and his ideals were those of the complete gentleman. Of his literary influence there is little evidence in the writings of Stevenson, but on Stevenson the man his influence was profound, and, as we shall see, it fell at a critical, a dangerous time. In Stevenson's early life there were two shaping influences very different if viewed superficially, yet in essentials strangely alike—the nurse Cummy and the professor Fleeming Jenkin. Of both we shall have to take further note.

For the rest the truant student made fitful

appearances in the classes of Kelland for mathematics, and of Tait for physics, these with the engineering class being necessary for a Science degree and the profession of engineer. For it was from the first ordained in the domestic circle that Louis should carry on the family tradition as a builder of lighthouses, harbours, and breakwaters. To gain practical knowledge, under his father's direction, he spent summer vacations in his eighteenth and nineteenth years at Anstruther, Wick, and on the small island of Earraid, off Mull, admirable training for the writer of romance whatever it might be for the apprentice engineer. He had already the gift of attracting attention, and in remote parts you may still hear old people talk vaguely of " Tam Stevenson's son who went abroad, am tel't, and wrote a wheen o' books tellin' aboot the Highlands and sailors and redcoats and things." Some will add with a kind of wondering scorn, " It was a daft-like thing for the son o' sic a man to do." Even now there are parts in the land of John Knox where the teller of tales is held in low esteem, even if his name be Scott or Stevenson.

Occasionally, however, Louis's memory is cherished with pride in those scenes of his early wanderings. Thus the house in which he lodged at Anstruther, with one Bailie Brown, a carpenter, bears a bronze tablet with the inscription : " Robert Louis Stevenson lived in this house in the summer of 1868. Not one quick beat of your warm heart ; nor thought that came to you apart ; pleasure nor pity, love nor pain nor sorrow ; has gone by in vain." The date is 1899. He did not like Anstruther. To his mother he called it a " grey, sea-beaten hole " of which he was " sick." His landlady, the bailie's wife, was an excellent

woman much afflicted " with her stummick," and hence sympathetic with invalids. But the small beer she provided for dinner gave him the " gripes," and he was reduced to green-ginger pending the arrival of wine from 17 Heriot Row. Nevertheless, he found enjoyment independently of Mrs. Brown and her " chill table beer." In a chamber " scented with dry rose-leaves " he shut himself up and toiled night after night, with fearful if inspiring visions of " death and immortality," the immortality apparently of an everlasting fame. The fruits of those secret labours were a series of dramatic monologues in verse which he called " Voces Fidelium," and part of a Covenanting novel, which was probably a blend of Cummy, Wodrow, and John the vanquisher of Satan, with a dash of Walter Scott. Neither effort has survived; but in view of what is to follow it should be noted that the monologues were in verse.

At Wick he had a thrilling experience in diving, and one letter written from that bleak, malodorous place of herring and fishermen, contains a description of a storm which literary students may profitably compare with the later and famous description of the hurricane in the bay of Apia. On the trip to Earraid, in his nineteenth year, he met Sam Bough, a noted painter of his day and a Bohemian of the old school. From Bough Louis had the first real compliment to his gifts as a talker. " You've such a pleasant manner, you know," said the artist in his gruff way. " Quite captivated my old woman, you did. She couldn't talk of anything else "—a tribute which Louis recorded with glee.

There was also a visit to Shetland in the Northern Lights steamer *The Pharos*, following

the track of Sir Walter Scott and Robert Stevenson. In the light of after events those summer experiences are to be taken rather as steps in the education of the romance-writer than of the engineer, though Thomas Stevenson was not " ill-pleased " with the progress of his pupil. From the visit to Earraid may be dated that sentiment for the Highlands which finds expression in *Kidnapped* and numerous letters and autobiographical fragments ; perhaps also of the ambition to establish a Highland ancestry, for already he was beginning to revolt against the lowland type as he found it about him in Edinburgh. What that revolt was to mean we shall see later.

## As Others Saw Him

As the schoolboy had been, so the University student continued to be—with developments and aggravations. He was solitary and he was eccentric, with an ostentatious taste for the bizarre in appearance and behaviour. One who remembers him well as a fellow-student has given me this picture of him as he appeared to the eyes of his contemporaries :

" At that time Louis Stevenson was the queerest-looking object you could conceive. To begin with he was badly put together, a slithering, loose flail of a fellow, all joints, elbows, and exposed spindle-shanks, his trousers being generally a foot too short in the leg. He was so like a scarecrow that one almost expected him to creak in the wind. And what struck us all was that he seemed to take a pride in aggravating the oddities of nature. When the weather happened to be fine—and I don't

remember seeing him when it wasn't—he came in a battered straw hat that his grandfather must have worn and laid aside because it was out-of-date. Under that antiquated headgear his long, lank hair fell straggling to his shoulders, giving him the look of a quack or a gipsy. He wore duck trousers and a black shirt, with loose collar and a tie that might be a strip torn from a cast-away carpet. His jacket was of black velvet, and it was noticeable that it never seemed good or new. We remarked among ourselves that there must be a family trunk full of old clothes which he was wearing out.

"As you may suppose, all this was matter for ridicule which we made no attempt to conceal; but his airs were even more ridiculous than his clothes. He seemed to make eccentricity a cult. He was always posing, always, as the phrase went, showing off. You know what that means among students. We just laughed at him, dubbing him crank and humbug. He seemed not to care a straw; in fact, he rather liked being the object of so much attention. The more we jeered and gibed the more he posed. Maybe it was defiance: I don't know. But if he had any feeling, he must have been one of the most unhappy men who ever set foot in the old quadrangle. So far as we could tell he was a favourite with nobody. He had no friends that we could see. We simply thought him a fool and expressed that opinion with the freedom of our kind.

"In class, when it pleased him to attend, he was the worst-behaved man of my acquaintance. Not that he made a noise. His way was an offensive, provocative attitude of sneering. How well I remember the smile of disdain on his queer, foreign-looking face! Once a lecturer turned on him. He did not attempt to hit back as some of the lustier

spirits would have done! No, he just leered and subsided. He seemed to think the whole course of college teaching an elaborate and stupid joke, fit only for asses. And the asses did not take kindly to the idea. Since then some of us have been sorry we did not try to understand him better; but no one seeing him then could be surprised at our attitude. We were young, and perhaps a bit blind as well and could not foresee what was coming. I must add that to-day we who survive are glad and proud to say we knew him. The queer Louis Stevenson with his queer ways is remembered and admired when the rest of us are forgotten. I think genius is very apt to be misjudged in its beginnings. Some of us would now give more than we can tell for half an hour's intimate talk with the youth we laughed at and despised more than fifty years ago, or even a shake of his hand."

The picture is not flattering, but it is given because it is typical of descriptions by others who joined in the chorus of jeers and gibes at the "daft-like, egotistical" Louis Stevenson. One recalls him as "a bundle of affectations some of them almost suggesting a touch of insanity." The verdict of another is that "he was so consumed with conceit he could not even walk properly, but must for ever go mincing and posing like a dancing-master." All agree that he went his own way and followed his own tastes and desires with no regard whatever to the opinions of others.

These are candid judgments of student days, but it is fair to say that time has softened their harshness, and that in nearly every instance those who have favoured me with their recollections and reminiscences have added a note of admiration for the later Stevenson. "How," said one who

became an ardent Stevensonian, " could we mere lads discern the hero and genius in the guise in which he then appeared ? We simply saw nothing in him but absurdity because we were stupid. And our failure, mark you, was the failure of Edinburgh in general. Not until others discovered Robert Louis Stevenson for us did we begin to see what fools we had been. Some are not even yet cured of their blindness. As for the rest of us, it would be no violence to truth to take our present enthusiasm as the measure of our remorse."

Again, as was the case at school, Louis took no part in games. Once only did he make an inglorious appearance in University sport, and the distinction was not of his seeking. Town and college were engaged in a good old-fashioned fight with snowballs, and perhaps something harder than snow. The battle raged in front of Surgeons' Hall, a short distance above the University gates. Louis, a spectator by chance, climbed to some coign of vantage to watch the fray. Suddenly the police appeared, and the watcher descending hurriedly from his perch dropped into the arms of a constable. He protested that he was a mere spectator of the fight, not a participant. The police retorted succinctly they knew " that old yarn," and hustled him off to the police-station. On the way Mrs. Stevenson passed the crowd in a carriage, but did not recognise her son, and some hours passed before he was rescued by his father, on the understanding that the innocent culprit would keep the peace for the future. His own account of the incident is characteristic : " As long as we were on the Bridges I felt ashamed of myself ; but as soon as we wheeled round and were marching up the High Street I

realised that I was a hero "—a confession which affords an illuminative glimpse of the real Stevenson.

## The "Spec"

College societies proved more attractive than college classrooms. As an aspiring politician Louis joined the Conservative Club and made speeches, sarcastically or vehemently denouncing Liberals and Liberalism, without impressing even sympathetic audiences by his gifts of oratory. Always a voluble talker, he was never an effective public speaker, a paradox not infrequently illustrated by voluble talkers. But his pet society, the one Edinburgh institution, indeed, with which his fame is indissolubly associated, was the Speculative which figures so frequently and so prominently in his writings. For that society he conceived a life-long affection, and its influence upon him was beyond question. It is therefore appropriate that distant readers should know something of its character and purpose.

As he remarks himself, it is a society of some antiquity, and his biographer may add that he has made it famous far beyond the bounds of Edinburgh and of Scotland. Its constitution is peculiar. Though housed in the University buildings, it enjoys an independent existence which on more than one occasion it has triumphantly defended against the encroachments of the University authorities. To-day it is completely autonomous, managing its own affairs without let or hindrance, as, in fact, it has done for many years and did in Stevenson's time. Readers will remember the affectionate description of the "Spec" in *Memories*

*and Portraits*, and the frequent references in the Letters to the happy hours Stevenson spent within its dingy historic walls. Its ideals have always been high and have been wonderfully sustained.

Founded in 1764 by half a dozen young students for "Improvement in Literary Composition and Public Speaking," it might give the impression of being merely a glorified Young Men's Literary and Debating Society. Its members have certainly been young, and have written essays and conducted debates, as studiously if not always as decorously commonplace, as if they met in a church hall or mechanics' institute. Where it differs from such societies is in the quality of its members and the fame which some of them have later achieved. Creech, the Edinburgh publisher of Burns and afterwards twice Lord Provost of the City, was its first president, and by association may be said to have introduced the element of pure literature. There is no sign that he ever had an opportunity to introduce his illustrious author. As the society developed, however, it became in an especial sense a training-ground for forensic orators, nearly all the legal luminaries of Edinburgh during the past century and a half having been included in its membership. It was as a law student that Stevenson was an active member.

Among the names mentioned by him are those of Brougham, Jeffrey, Horner, "the perfect Whig," as W. E. Henley half-ironically called him, and Emmet, not Robert of tragic glory, but his brother Thomas Addis. Emmet's connection with the society piquantly illustrates the force and permanency of political prejudice. After serving as president for three consecutive years, he incurred the wrath of certain members for being an Irish

patriot and daring to correspond with France. Accordingly, on a motion of the secretary, one John Waugh, then or later an Edinburgh bookseller, seconded by "Mr. Henry Brougham," his name was erased from "the list of the Speculative Society." Emmet, whose career struck the imagination of Stevenson, began as a medical student, turned, like his famous and unfortunate brother, to law, emigrated to America and became Attorney-General to the State of New York, in which office, doubtless, he was able to carry on the "Irish Question" with undiminished zeal. One wonders whether he and his distinguished adversary, Mr. Henry Brougham, ever thought of each other when both were great officers of law. For Brougham's literary character the curious may turn to Macaulay's correspondence as given in his Life by Trevelyan.

Other eminent members who interested Stevenson were Baron Benjamin Constant de Rebecque, a Swiss who had the distinction of figuring for one wild moment in the mad drama of the French Revolution.[1] The celebrated Sir James Mackintosh, philosopher, jurist, critic, who crossed sword with Edmund Burke, and John Gibson Lockhart were also members. Others, a great multitude in fact, rose to be people of importance in their day and generation—judges, advocates, solicitors, professors, and what not, worthy men worthily pursuing their callings and taking such wages as were going. But to the present generation the vast majority of them are not even names, so swiftly does Oblivion take to herself merely local or professional reputations.

[1] Also one of the many lovers of Madame de Staël and author of a sentimental novel over which half Europe wept its eyes out.

## ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

Two names and two only stand out in undimmed, nay, in increasing lustre—Walter Scott and Robert Louis Stevenson. But for them, the Speculative Society, useful and influential as it has been, would have no interest for the world in general. Literature is a hard task-mistress, jealous, exacting, niggardly of her honours, calling many and choosing few, but the laurels she bestows upon the elect outlast all others. As long as the " Spec " endures —and its vitality appears to increase with age— the world will remember to its glory that Scott and Stevenson were once members. Scott served as secretary and librarian, and his ill-spelled minutes and odd little account-books are now the society's most precious possessions. Stevenson, coming two generations later, was even more intimately associated with it; and more than Scott, more than any other member whatsoever, has spread its fame over the habitable globe.

He was admitted to membership on March 2, 1869, and as the historian of the society, Dr. William R. Dickson, records with just pride, " is the most famous man of letters who has belonged to the society since Scott. No more interesting personality has ever been of our number, and no one has in the public eye been more closely identified with the society." Early in the society's career a rule was made that no fiction should be admitted to its library, but an exception is made with the authors of *Waverley* and *Weir of Hermiston*.

Stevenson was twice elected president, in the years 1872–3 and 1873–4, a sufficient testimony to his popularity; and during his entire membership he took an active, sometimes a " riotous part " in

the proceedings. The subjects on which he contributed essays are interesting indications of his taste and studies at the time. They included, " The Influence of the Covenanting Persecution on the Scottish Mind " (a suggestive subject), " Notes on Paradise Lost," " Notes on the Nineteenth Century," " Two Questions on the Relation between Christ's Teaching and Modern Christianity," and on " Law and Free Will." In debate he denounced capital punishment pretty much as Archie Weir denounces it in *Weir of Hermiston*. All accounts agree that, despite his brightness and agility, he was a poor debater. Among his particular friends at the " Spec " were James Walter Ferrier, of whom he has written so feelingly; Robert Glasgow Brown, his future editor in *Vanity Fair* and *London ;* and, most intimate of all, Charles Baxter, Writer to the Signet, his lifelong helper and devoted agent during the years of exile. These names must inevitably recur in the course of my narrative.

Anticipating a little, I may say that Stevenson's valedictory address, as president, was announced for delivery on March 25, 1873. When the night came, however, he was ill and his paper was read by Charles Baxter, then, I think, secretary. The manuscript was endorsed with the characteristic message, " I am strictly on my back—have not turned on either side since yesterday morning. Very jolly, however.—R. L. S." The copy was preserved, and after his death was found among his papers at Vailima. Now, through the courtesy of Charles Baxter, it is in the possession of the society, reverently deposited in a glass-covered case beside the Scott treasures. It is written on foolscap in a large, boyish, tolerably-clear hand.

Some day, perhaps, the society will print the document in full, and then it will be found that many of the qualities which endear Stevenson to a world of readers were already beginning to appear. In looking back he found a few things to regret, among them " unrepressed loquacities," but on the whole he regretted that the good times were over. As he told his fellow-members, they would find it come strangely to them—" left-handedly, so to speak—when you have to leave this room for the last time and shut the door behind you upon three years of happy life."

The day might come, too, when they would have curious anecdotes to tell " of famous men members of the society, and write to the biographers in a fine, shaky octogenerian hand."

After honouring those who " did not come to the surface in after-life " with a quotation from Walt Whitman, he added ; " Yes ! if we should have here some budding Scott, or if the new Shakespeare should here be incubating his fine parts, we shall all, gentlemen, have a hand in the finished article. Some thought of ours will have taken hold upon his mind, some seasonable repartee, some happy word, will have fallen into the ' good soil ' of his genius and will afterwards bring forth an hundredfold."

Read to-day the passage seems prophetic. Genius, as Ruskin observed, is quite conscious of its own powers, however modest it may be in proclaiming them. Did the young Stevenson dream that he was himself the budding Scott he pictured ; that the day would come when his own name would stand second on the society's long roll of honour, and that his memory would be cherished with undying affection and pride by all his successors ?

Some such thought appears to be latent in that valedictory address, with its strange, touching appeal to the future.

The influence of the " Spec " was not confined to its own narrow walls. With three others of its members he founded the *Edinburgh University Magazine*, which, as they hoped, would afford still wider scope for literary experiments. Of the eager enterprising quartette, two were Walter Ferrier and Glasgow Brown. The magazine, which was issued in a yellow cover—" the best part of it," according to Stevenson's account—was priced sixpence and bore the imprint of two brothers named Livingstone, booksellers opposite the University who had been " debauched to play the part of publishers." The first number was exuberantly edited by all four proprietors, not, it may be thought, without hot disputes in passing proofs. The second number was edited by Stevenson and Ferrier, the third by Stevenson alone, the fourth, apparently, by nobody. With the fourth issue the bantling died quietly of inanition—and in debt. Thomas Stevenson paid his son's share of the liabilities, and Louis, cheerfully telling himself that " the time was not yet ripe nor the man ready," turned to other interests. With his usual ability to make " copy " out of his own experiences, he describes the whole enterprise with as much pomp and circumstance as if it were a decisive Waterloo, or at least an epoch-making experiment in magazine production.

His own contributions, some six in number, included papers on " Edinburgh Students of 1824," " The Modern Student Considered Generally," " The Philosophy of Umbrellas," " Debating Societies," and " The Philosophy of Nomenclature," a subject which interested him to the end.

These attracted no attention either by virtue of their style or matter. But another, "An Old Scots Gardener," after being remodelled and several times rewritten, was reprinted and may be read in his collected works. Other contributors were Professor Blackie and Dr. Joseph Bell, the original, it is understood, of Sir A. Conan Doyle's popular Sherlock Holmes. Mrs. Bancroft the actress, later Lady Bancroft, contributed a poem on "Woman's Rights," then, as ever since, a burning question.

At the same time there were other developments of a more important, or at any rate a more spectacular, kind. Louis, thirsting it may be for sensation, began to have the "religious difficulties" to which there have been so many veiled, "half-concealing, half-revealing" references. But with these and their effects I will deal in a subsequent chapter.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE SEDULOUS APE

MEANWHILE, unknown to critics and scoffers, he was " learning to write " with an assiduity and determination surely unequalled in the history of literary apprenticeships. Other authors somehow " learn to write," but say nothing of the process. We have to imagine how Shakespeare obtained the secret of those glories of style which make him unapproachable and inimitable. We have to guess how Coleridge came by the style of " Kubla Khan " and " The Ancient Mariner," how Hawthorne got his magic or what ordeals Thackeray underwent before achieving the felicities of *Esmond*. Stevenson, genially garrulous and confidential, preserves no mysterious secrecy. On the contrary, he joyously admits us to his workshop, nay, buttonholes us and insists that we shall enter and behold him manipulating his tools. It is an amazing spectacle. The sparks fly from his anvil, filling the air ; the chips from his axe, the shavings from his plane litter the floor ; the rasping of the file almost sets the teeth on edge. It is smithy and carpenter's shop in one, a literary factory where the neophyte may delight his soul by watching the ardent operator at work, with a joy and determination which are infectious.

At school and University Stevenson was a consistent and ostentatious idler. In Anstruther, Wick, the Island of Earraid, and elsewhere his engineering studies were little better than a pretence, perfunctorily carried on to please others. But in his self-appointed task of mastering the literary art all his energies, all his faculties were engaged. And he was proud, and justly proud, of the result. "No one," he observes, with pardonable vanity, "ever had such pains to learn a trade as I had; but I slogged at it day in day out, and I frankly believe (thanks to my dire industry) I have done more with smaller gifts than almost any other man of letters in the world." It is a well-merited tribute to himself. His gifts were not of the superlatively rich order; but his industry was prodigious and unflagging. Had the ineffable Smiles known of him, we should have another delectable chapter in that classic of worldly prudence, once the textbook of aspiring youth, *Self-Help*.

Stevenson was pre-eminently a self-helper. If any literary tyro ever read, marked, and inwardly digested it was he, and the rewards of industry were not denied him. We see him at that early stage reading critically, intensively, jotting down words and phrases, weighing them, testing them on his literary palate, fitting them into scraps of imitative description and reflection. His particular models were Montaigne, Hazlitt, Lamb, Sir Thomas Browne, Defoe, Hawthorne, and Wordsworth. It cannot be called a striking list; but a single author or even a single book digested and assimilated is mentally more nutritive than a whole library cursorily bolted. "Hamlet" or "Macbeth" lovingly studied, mastered, and understood is likely to prove more stimulating, more fruitful of results than a

hundred " best-books " vacantly read "'twixt sleeping and waking." To his chosen models Stevenson played " the sedulous ape," imitating their turn of phrase, their mode of approach, their use of individual and characteristic words. " I lived with words," he confesses. They became to him not mere acquaintances nor even mere symbols, but intimate companions, living entities, each with a personality and a soul of its own.

Yet it may be doubted whether this method of " living with words " is the best or even the second best for the beginner. One thing with all his intense study, Stevenson had not yet divined, that the great creative writer thinks not in words, but in phrases, in images, in visions that seem independent of the mechanism of composition. With him just then it was nearly all mechanism, so far as alert and dainty discrimination in language can be mechanical. This, I think, partly accounts for the meagreness of matter and the excessive attention to manner in his early writings ; and also for his long and arduous apprenticeship. It took him many years to discover that style at its highest and best (and style was the object of his quest) is the product of energy and imagination, not of any fastidious or painful search for mere verbal felicities. It is scarcely necessary to add that these have their place in any style that is worthy of the name ; but it is a comparatively low place. Stevenson's mistake—a natural mistake for one of his gifts and temperament—was to elevate them to a place of supreme importance.

Probably most authors, at any rate in these late times, begin with imitations. Even the young Shakespeare echoes Marlowe ; and Milton's poetic ancestry has been traced back to Greece and

Palestine. But the stronger the native talent the quicker is the imitative stage passed. Stevenson lingered in it until late in his career, as though he lacked the sure instinct of genius either for style or subject. There is scarcely a piece of his writing from the early paper on " Roads " to the late *St. Ives*, which is not in essence a conscious and self-conscious exercise in style in the various manners of his various masters. Not till he reached *Weir of Hermiston* did he show a real understanding of the art of arts for the creative writer—a complete forgetfulness of self, a childlike surrender to the impulses and promptings of his own imagination. I emphasise that fact because it poignantly and sadly suggests what Stevenson might have done had he not died at four-and-forty.

Stevenson's, then, was not a quick or facile development. His was not the golden ease of the born stylist, the ease of Burns in poetry and of Newman in prose. As little was it the profuseness of an exuberant, urgent imagination like Scott's. His first real effort as a story-teller, *The New Arabian Nights*, was written when he was twenty-eight, and it was not till he was thirty-three that he made a decisive appearance with *Treasure Island*. At nineteen Congreve, whose style fascinated Stevenson, produced his play *The Old Bachelor*. At twenty Pope had written the *Essay on Criticism*. At the same age Byron wrote " English Bards and Scotch Reviewers," and at twenty-four had published the first two cantos of " Childe Harold." Before he was twenty-five Dickens, who certainly did not " live with words," had written *Sketches by Boz* and *The Pickwick Papers*. At the same age Keats had finished his work and lay in the Protestant cemetery in Rome. At the same age also

Macaulay wrote that Essay on Milton which dazzled and enchanted Jeffrey. These incidental comparisons are not made in disparagement of Stevenson. Some talents develop rapidly, some slowly. Not the rate of progress, but the result, is ultimately the important thing.

What has to be noted specifically is that Stevenson's, if a slow, was a continuous development from beginnings in which he alone discerned any chance, any prospect of success. And being a slow growth, it is probable, indeed it seems certain, that had he lived the normal span of years he would have gone on producing and progressing when contemporaries who had started more promptly or more brilliantly were fallen silent and exhausted. For his success he fought desperately, and that early persistency in self-training for his chosen calling illustrates a phase of his character which events will more and more emphasise as we proceed—I mean his iron resolution. One who knew and understood him well remarked to me recently, "On the surface Louis Stevenson seemed all frivolity and flippancy ; but beneath he was flint." Flint he was in the sense of following his own ideals and carrying out his own purposes with a resolution that simply did not know how to yield, scarcely even to temporise. It carried him through many a crisis that would have daunted a less courageous man ; at certain critical junctures it made him risk everything, defy, as it seemed to those who loved him, every dictate of prudence and of reason.

For the present we have to note that regarding himself and his powers he was under no delusion, however playfully he might chatter to correspondents. Very early and with decisive clearness he divined the one thing he could hope to do if he were

to make a figure in life ; with equal clearness he saw how it was to be done, and he set himself to do it with results which confounded scoffers, objectors, and cavillers.

In the course of his severe and protracted self-training he produced essays, tales, sketches and poems all blindly imitative. He related the story of Robin Hood in verse, precursor, it may be supposed, of *The Black Arrow*, blending, as he fancied, Chaucer and Keats. He wrote *Cain : An Epic* in imitation of Browning, and *Monmouth : A Tragedy* in imitation of Swinburne. In another tragedy, *The King's Pardon*, he was on the track of John Webster, with whose dark and concentrated genius his own has nothing in common.

> We cease to grieve, cease to be fortune's slaves,
> Nay, cease to die—by dying—

is a flight beyond Stevenson at his highest and best.

The poetic activity here indicated should be noted. There is a general impression even among ardent, well-informed Stevensonians that in trying his prentice hand in literature Stevenson practised almost wholly in prose. That is a mistake for which he was himself partly responsible. In his manifold confidences concerning his manner of " learning to write " he dwells mostly on his imitations of the prose-writers he admired ; and it was chiefly as an artist in prose that he was hailed both by critics and the public. In many quarters of course his poetry, especially *A Child's Garden of Verses*, was read with delight ; but the enthusiasm so roused was insignificant compared with the ardour of admiration excited by his prose writings. Not unnaturally, therefore, he was taken as a

prose-writer who deviated incidentally, as it were, into occasional verse.

Moreover, in the preface to a posthumous edition of his poems Mrs. Stevenson stated explicitly that poetry had never been more than a pastime with him, something, we were left to infer, to which he turned aside for relaxation or amusement from severer, more exacting work. The truth, however, is that from the very first Stevenson wrote verse at least as assiduously as he wrote prose, and that at a critical period in his early life he made verse far more than prose a vehicle for self-expression. The discovery of that fact came twenty years after his death ; and it is not the least curious incident in a strange and eventful history. To that subject I shall have to return. Meanwhile, in dealing with Stevenson in his prentice days I emphasise the fact that he was an industrious and consistent writer of verse ; and that he put into it far more of himself, his feelings, emotions, prejudices, and passions than ever he put into prose.

It is more than probable, I think, that in his passionate quest for style Stevenson overdid imitation, as he overrated its value ; and that in playing " the sedulous ape " so long and zealously he was actually hindering, not helping, his own essential talent. But the fact that he persisted in face of almost every species of discouragement illustrates again that tenacity of purpose, which was in reality the foundation of his character.

## A Contest of Wills

One result, one inevitable result of his persistency was domestic disapproval, which as time

passed touched the verge of tragedy. Literary ambition made a Science degree impossible, and with the degree went the hope that Lou would carry on and embellish the family tradition. Between father and son it resolved itself into a contest of wills, and in the end the stronger will prevailed, as in the nature of things it must prevail. We have Stevenson's description of his father written in later years, and independent testimony confirms its essential accuracy. In his own way and in his own sphere Thomas Stevenson was emphatically what is called a strong man. He knew the world; he had faced difficulties and overcome them by virtue of sheer native force. He was stern, dour, "passionately prejudiced," and apt to be arbitrary if opposed or thwarted. His massive character had something of the impressiveness of mountains, and in moments of conflict the hardness of granite. Between him and his son it was Goliath and David over again; and as in the old story not the giant, but the stripling was victor.

Defeat was embittered by the fact that it came just when success seemed assured. In spite of truancy and indifference, Louis appeared to be making real if tardy progress towards the appointed goal. In the last week of March 1871, when three months past his twentieth birthday, he read a paper to the Royal Society of Arts on "A New Form of Intermittent Light for Lighthouses" which won him a silver medal of the value of £3. Thomas Stevenson, gratified and elated, saw in this success the fulfilment of his hope that Louis would after all adorn the family profession. In less than a fortnight the eager dream was shattered for ever.

The blow fell in the course of a quiet walk along the Cramond Road out towards Queensferry, when

the two men were alone. From that walk Thomas Stevenson returned with the definite knowledge that the son in whom all his ambitions were centred would never succeed him as engineer to the Commissioners of Northern Lights. In a rhyming epistle to that body Louis thus expressed his sentiments :

> I thocht I'd serve wi' you, sirs, yince,
> But I've thocht better of it since :
> The maitter I will no wise mince
> But tell ye true ;
> I'll service wi' some ither prince
> An' no' wi' you.

The blow made the strong man reel ; the weakling went his way apparently unaffected. In the home circle his obstinate blindness, his utter stupidity (so it seemed) caused not so much disappointment as consternation. Mrs. Stevenson pleaded with her boy to obey his father : for in that household, so far as she could make it so, Thomas Stevenson's slightest word or wish was sacred. She argued and implored in vain. Louis's decision was immovable. Whatever happened, however adverse the Fates might be elsewhere, he would not be an engineer. He would serve a prince of his own choosing.

## The Idyll of Swanston

In that life of conflict, ferment, and ridicule one feature stands out with idyllic softness and beauty. In the spring of 1867, when Louis was in his seventeenth year, Thomas Stevenson, looking about for

a summer residence, leased Swanston Cottage, some five miles south of Edinburgh and less than three miles distant from Colinton Manse. It stands embowered in trees in a little green nook facing Caer Ketton, the highest but one of the Pentland Hills. A quarter of a mile or so to the south-east, but hidden from view by a tiny plantation, lies the old-world hamlet of Swanston, a relic, it might seem, of a defunct or forgotten civilisation. In the hollow between stands the farmsteading mentioned by Stevenson, and a little above, like a solitary grey blot on the landscape, the farm dwelling-house. Behind it, hillward, is the cluster of cottages which makes up the isolated, primitive little community. The small thatched cabin of "Roaring John Todd," the Pentland Shepherd, known now to all the world, still stands, but as I saw it in rather a ruffled and decayed condition.

To-day you will find no trace or memory of Stevenson in that hilly seclusion. The good folk of Swanston do not read his books nor cherish his fame. Such as knew him personally are gone, and there was nothing in the lank, idle, "daft-like" youth with the passion for "speirin' questions" and writing in "wee note-books," that they should tell their children of him. Pilgrims come from far lands—America, Australia, South Africa, and the Isles of the Sea—to do homage, and the bucolic natives learn with a sort of apathetic surprise that "a man ca'ed Steeveson" who "yince" lived there did something or other in which the outside world is interested. Some of them do not conceal their opinion that the visitors might be better employed than in "comin' gapin' an' meddlin' an' hinderin' honest folk at

their wark." What refreshment and inspiration Stevenson found there readers of his works know.

The scenery above Swanston is picturesque and mildly Highland, a place of hills and heather, of sheep and dogs, of little valleys and streams and springs, with seductive nooks of moss and fern. From the upper heights you look out over the fertile Lothian plain, the richest farming-land in Scotland ; and seaward the view includes the Bass and Berwick Law, the latter for ever associated with the most romantic incident in the career of Scotland's most romantic man, the Great Montrose. In summer weather it is a scene which would have pleased Theocritus, even without the southern sunshine and the " sweet murmur " of the blue Sicilian Sea.

In that charming retreat Stevenson spent some of the happiest of the comparatively few happy days of his nomadic chequered life. " A green spot in the folds of the Pentlands," he calls it himself, and a green spot it remained enshrined in his memory. Of Edinburgh he had harsh, even bitter recollections, though softened in the end by time, distance, and the sentiment of the exiled Scot ; but Swanston, like Colinton, he recalled with the fondness of unbroken, unruffled affection. In every man's heart some scene, some spot hallowed by early or tender association, holds a place of its own. To Stevenson, from first to last, Swanston typified all that was dear and beautiful. The Pentlands were more home to him than the streets and Wynds of Edinburgh. There in the long summer days he breathed the bracing air of the hills, felt the magic of " winds austere and pure." There he heard the " whaups crying," his " heart remembered

how " when he knew he could never hear them again. There he made the acquaintance of shepherds, gardeners, ploughmen, and simple farm folk, of dogs and sheep and the elementary things of life. When long afterwards he wrote of quiet places and quiet people with " rosy faces and serene eyes," it was of the Pentland slopes and dells he was thinking.

Moreover, to the imaginative, impressible boy the place was a paradise of romance. It had been the scene of broil and battle, of relentless persecution and relentless revenge. Many of his favourite green nooks had once been crimson with the blood of fighting-men. Covenanters had died there, exulting in their martyrdom, and in a last fierce effort invoking the vengeance of Heaven on the " devil's tools," their slayers. Some of them were still known to " walk " in lonely by-ways, bloody, ghastly, and chittering or screeching curses. When tempests raved, the gifted in such matters could hear their wail blending with the shrieking of the blast. Yet, again, Prince Charlie and his men had been there, leaving many a relic of themselves. Here was stuff to feed the young imagination, and beyond doubt Stevenson was enriched and inspired.

Yet more important, his mother and he were much by themselves ; and there was fostered the mutual understanding, the comradeship which lasted as long as his life. Between Stevenson and his father there were barriers which were never completely broken down, barriers of temperament, ideals, and ambitions ; between Stevenson and his mother there were no barriers, at any rate on her side. From the first she was his partisan, active or passive ; now in the intimate communion of

Swanston they were drawn together in those bonds which, in the magnificent language of Burke, "though light as air are strong as links of iron." There more than anywhere else he was her own, her exclusive possession to be cherished as something infinitely dear and precious. In Edinburgh, as we shall see, there was much to grieve and wound her, much that was to suffuse even her cheerfulness with gloom, if not despair. At Swanston, in the earlier years at least, all was serenity and sunshine.

And in that delectable atmosphere there came to her, I think, the first clear perception of Louis's exceptional talent, perhaps also of his exceptional destiny. At Swanston she began in earnest to make an album of his writings, as though she had premonitions of his coming celebrity, which she kept as a sacred treasure to the last. At Swanston, too, she first gave him unreservedly the sympathy and encouragement in his literary ambitions which never afterwards faltered, and in many a dark hour proved his best inspiration. What she very specifically became to him at Swanston she continued to be till all was ended in far-distant Samoa. A man, it has been wisely said, is what his mother makes him. For much that is admirable in Robert Louis Stevenson, in some respects for what was best in him, he, and we, are indebted to the slim, fair-haired daughter of Colinton Manse; and it was at Swanston when they were alone together, that, so to speak, she made him unalterably her own.

First and last, Swanston was the summer residence of the Stevensons for fourteen years, and it remained an abiding influence with Louis. It

appears and reappears in his essays ; he constantly reverts to it in his letters ; it is conspicuous in almost the last thing he wrote, the unfinished *St. Ives ;* and to it he would fain have returned when return was impossible. To think of the Pentlands is to conjure up a vision of the youthful Stevenson, ardent, curious, stretching out, as it were, with both hands, to seize and test life. In that tranquil, romantic spot, tended, guarded, inspired, loved with the jealousy of doting affection, he talked, read, wrote bad verse and imitative prose, dreamed, planned feats of achievement which his quick imagination alone could see or foresee. There, too, he roamed with John Todd, "the oldest shepherd in the Pentlands," who began by bellowing threats because the inquisitive idler disturbed his sheep, and ended as something more than a friend ; walked beside Adam Ritchie as he ploughed ; and discussed flowers and religion with Robert Young, the pious "old Scots Gardener." To-day they are all remembered because he knew them and chose to make them known.

It was an ideal training for the budding romancer, an ideal mode of storing impressions and filling the imagination with suggestions and images. I have said that Swanston represents one of Stevenson's rare periods of true happiness. It was, in fact, the happiest, in some respects the most vital, period of his life. Never again, save for one brief moment, was he to enjoy in its full perfection the tranquillity which to budding genius is as rain and sun to the seedling. Yet even in that Eden, so sunny, so calm, so beneficently formative, he could not have been wholly at peace with himself. Even then Jekyll and Hyde were secretly in conflict. For

there was another side to his life, a side which was not idyllic or charming, but sinister and illicit. The beginnings of that side date roughly from his eighteenth year.

# CHAPTER V

## A MELODRAMATIC REVOLT

Once made, Louis's decision to abandon engineering stood fast. But as a concession to parental feeling, parental prejudice, as he clearly viewed it, he consented to take up the study of the law. There were encouraging precedents. Scott had been a lawyer ; Jeffrey had been a lawyer ; and there were other literary lawyers to serve as examples and exemplars. Besides, law was a real profession, whereas literature was something anomalous and nondescript, hanging on, dubiously enough, to the skirts of respectability, and often, if tradition were to be trusted, lacking a dinner.

Moreover, with the Stevenson connection and influence the law might be made a crutch until in the Providence of God, it should become a staff. The concession was in the nature of things a compromise, and Stevenson cheerfully took it as such, that is, a compromise on the part of others which left him free and unfettered to pursue his own purpose. Once or twice, indeed, in the course of work with tutors (there were always tutors to help the lame dog over stiles) he professed enthusiasm for his new studies, and even spoke eagerly of making a figure as an advocate. But the zeal was a mere momentary effervescence. Nominally

he was a law student ; in reality his real interest, his real concern, lay far outside the bounds of law.

Outwardly his life continued to be what it had been, with the bizarre aspects perhaps a little accentuated. His appearance then, I am informed by one who saw him often, was ridiculed by the wits as a blend of the quack, the gipsy, and the Punch-and-Judy man, with the latter predominating. In dress he was more and more flagrantly, even defiantly, negligent. The long hair tossed by the wind ; the antique straw hat set at an angle meant to be rakish but in reality merely clownish ; the velvet jacket, shapeless with age and use ; the foreign look, assiduously cultivated, as it appeared, the lank, loose, ill-jointed figure, as of an animated skeleton flaunting itself in the face of day ; the general air of queerness and affectation—all this seemed an outrage, a studied insult, to Edinburgh respectability. In the street people giggled as he passed or stood staring in wonder and derision. Sticklers for convention elevated their eyebrows, resolved not to see or know him. Never was anyone less *persona grata* to his fellow-citizens than this " truest child of Edinburgh," as later he has been called and claimed. And you are to remember that he was the son of Thomas Stevenson, the very type and pattern of honoured orthodoxy, the grandson of the Rev. Lewis Balfour, a Hebrew of the Hebrews in all that was decent, devout and seemly.

Society, which he affected to disdain, saw little of him, but his rare appearances were characteristic. He went to dinner-parties in velvet jacket, black shirt, tweed trousers, and blue tie, as if to emphasise his contempt for conventional evening-dress.

Gentlemen, he said, should not be a travesty of waiters. Behind his back people tapped their foreheads, significantly whispering suggestive things about " a vacancy in the upper storey." Such incidents recalled to-day are the foibles of genius ; then, however, they were the ebullitions of an insufferable conceit, a blatant, if not actually insane egotism posing in ludicrous originality. There is no sign that he was perturbed or disconcerted, though later references in his letters and reminiscences suggest that he noted and understood. A weaker man, a man less richly dowered with a sustaining self-sufficiency, would have collapsed, or at any rate been shamed or subdued into some show of conformity ; Stevenson actually exulted in his grotesque celebrity. As in the face of opposition, so in the face of derision he took his own way, glad, always glad, if by any means he could attract attention.

As if to make notoriety still more notorious, he began about that time to experience and parade the " religious difficulties " over which good people have murmured so regretfully. In his childhood under the dominance of the masterful Cummy, Lou was, as we have seen, " eminently religious " in the strictly Cummy or Covenanting sense. But the religious tenets of an elderly nurse steeped in superstition, however beautiful in sentiment, however hallowed by tradition, could in no wise suffice for an ardent, independent inquirer bent on searching out wisdom and understanding for himself, and testing the foundations of the universe by the light so obtained. Cummy's teaching was doubtless excellent for the nursery, as that of her mistress was excellent for the drawing-room at 17 Heriot Row ; but both were deplorably out-of-date. The

world moves, shifting and obliterating old landmarks.

> New occasions teach new duties,
> Time makes ancient good uncouth:
> They must upward still and onward
> Who would keep abreast of truth.

A rousing slogan for the youthful hero out to slay the dragons of superstition.

Nor were incentives and encouragement lacking. Huxley had arisen, and in the face of furious opposition had made the word " Agnostic " fashionable. At the same time Tyndall, in his charmingly-lucid style, had explained in terms of matter just how the world was created and of what, hinting it was not such an extraordinarily wonderful piece of work after all. The influence of those two was enormous and had curious effects. It forced the serious-minded to think, and it incited the frivolous-minded to levity. The former might grieve over the assaults on cherished beliefs; but the latter rejoiced, declaring that old-fashioned beliefs were doomed. It was great fun to have the universe in the melting-pot, and hear the Deity criticised like an incompetent architect who had made a hopeless mess of things. The young bloods of intellect whooped ravenously; like Job's war-horse they sniffed the battle and cried " Ha-ha! " burning for the fray. Louis, who had ever a *flair* for the limelight, was seized with the seven devils of scepticism. The faith of Cummy, the prayers of his father and mother, the sermonising of the Rev. Lewis Balfour, the creeds of the whole pious race of Balfours and Stevensons, what were they but old wives' fables?

Being what he was, he treated the discovery as something new and peculiar in the experience of the race, to be advertised and exploited to the uttermost. What concerned him must necessarily be of immense moment to the world. His master Montaigne, would reduce the universe to the personal equation ; improving on that method, the disciple would make the personal equation a trumpet for calling the universe to attention. His contemporaries, or at least some of them, took his displays of religious zeal as theatrical parade, part, in fact, of the general scheme of the showman. That seems too harsh a judgment. Youth is eager and impetuous. Huxleyism and Tyndallism were in the air like an epidemic and were proving most frightfully infectious.

Huxley himself, for example, though the most admirable of men and of citizens, was nevertheless a sort of scientific pugilist or prize-idol smasher. Single-handed he fought the federated hosts of orthodoxy — Gladstone, the Duke of Argyll, Archbishops, Bishops, eminent divines of all shades and colours of creed. By a stroke of scientific humour he turned the incident of the Gaderene swine into a music-hall jest which sent the whole country into convulsions. He disposed of Biblical inspiration ; he disposed of miracles ; in fact, he knocked out the whole " under-pinning " of old theologies ; and the whole system of orthodoxy, so many believed, collapsed, burying its adherents in the ruins. There is something striking and dramatic in such a clean sweep of cherished faiths. It appeals especially to the theatrical instinct, and Louis was captivated. Moreover, he had been reading Heine, and the arch-mocker taught him to mock. We are still in the realm of imitations ; and

indeed, in religion as in literature, it seemed impossible for Stevenson to get away from his models. Just then his one desire was, in Johnson's words, "to be a smart modern thinker."

The consequence was a melodramatic revolt against all his fathers held dear in faith and morals. His progress in the new course was swift. First he was an agnostic ; then a sceptic, then, proceeding by leaps and bounds, he avowed himself a full-blown atheist. Whatever may be thought of his tact or his judgment, there can be no doubt of his courage ; as little can there be doubt of the manner in which it was received or the spirit it roused. When Louis was a child Macaulay visited Edinburgh on political business, and we find this suggestive entry in his journal : "This is Sunday—a Presbyterian Sunday—a Presbyterian Sacrament Sunday. The town is as still as if it were midnight. *Whoever opposed himself to the prevailing humour would run a great risk of being affronted.* There was one person whom Christians generally mention with respect who, I am sure, would not have walked Princes Street with safety."

Louis defied, flouted that religious humour, not timidly or shrinkingly, but with studied ostentation. In a set of verses written at that time, though not published till long afterwards, he addressed the priest as representing the sum total of superstition, thus :

> Stand on your putrid ruins—stand,
> White-neck-clothed bigot—

and proceeding exclaimed :

> Back, Minister of Christ and source of fear,
> We cherish freedom—back with thee and thine.

Let it not be supposed, however, that Stevenson alone of all the youths of his time in and around Heriot Row held "views" directly opposed to accepted and established creeds. "We were all in it, we young people," I have been told by one who remembers the time and the circumstances well, "only the rest of us kept our banner of revolt hid, while Louis fastened his exultantly to the chimney-top." That, of course, was Louis. His banner, however it might be blazoned, must always be kept flying from the chimney-top to challenge attention. We are to imagine the fiery atheist vaunting his doctrines in the very sanctuary of Scots Calvinism. That might have gratified David Hume; it horrified and distressed Thomas Stevenson and his wife, and their henchwoman Cummy. Others it partly horrified, partly amused. The consequence was inevitable. Outraged and scandalised in its chosen home, orthodoxy rose in its wrath and cast the blasphemous apostle of free-thought outside the pale. The clown, the *poseur*, bent on making himself ridiculous, might be forgiven or dismissed with sneering pity. It was impossible to forgive the pocket-Voltaire, blatantly and blasphemously doing his little worst to overthrow the Christian religion.

The distress at 17 Heriot Row was pitiable. To his friend, Charles Baxter, Stevenson rather hysterically described the situation. Questions as to belief were put to him, and he answered candidly enough according to his profession. "But," he added, "if I had foreseen the red hell of everything, I think I should have lied as I have lied so often before." He owned it was "rougher than hell" on his father. "But," he asked with a fine air, "can I help it?" How could he help it? Was

it not a condition of his being to keep his flag flying from the chimney-top? Thomas Stevenson burned in sullen, half-suppressed rage; his wife was prostrate. With a dramatic touch of pathos Louis owned to Mrs. Sitwell[1] he had probably "damned their happiness." Damned it was if misery and shame can damn. "What the devil am I to do?" he asked, and owned himself an abject idiot, yet found something cheerful to add concerning the felicity of being a fool.

The scandal seemed overwhelming. What had become of the teaching of Colinton Manse, of the prelections of Cummy, of the precept and example of father and mother? What, also, of the sacred traditions which produced the Solemn League and Covenant, with all those glories of martyrdom which were the boast and the pride of his kindred and countrymen? To the onlookers it was as if the rebel, in a fit of insanity, had insulted the Deity by spitting in His face.

It has been said "officially" that the only differences which ever divided Louis and his father were differences over this question of religion. That statement, as we shall see, is inaccurate; but that Thomas Stevenson felt, and felt with poignant bitterness, his son's atheistical vapourings there cannot be the shadow of a doubt. He was himself a man of sincere and heartfelt, if dark and narrow, piety, holding fast to the creed of his fathers. In matters of abstract religion his tastes were Catholic. He read Lactantius, Vossius, and Cardinal Bona. The first, probably because he was eloquent in denunciation of pagan theology, was packed up

[1] Now Lady Colvin, wife of Sir Sidney Colvin. (Lady Colvin died while this book was passing through the press.)

and taken on engineering journeys, so that a Father of the Church may be said to have presided at the building of Scottish lighthouses. More pertinently Thomas Stevenson wrote and published "A Layman's Sermon" on the text of Ecclesiastes, "Vanity of Vanities, saith the Preacher," which brought comfort to many readers.

It lies before me as I write, a solemn admonition, as it were, out of the vanished past, uttered in the grave, deep voice of Louis's father. If I have read it without profit, the fault is wholly my own, for plainly it is the utterance of a sincere and genuinely-devout soul with a profound sense of the transitoriness of human life. In effect it is a warning against the insidious intrusion of the spirit of worldliness and the perilous folly of allowing the concerns of this world to obscure or blot out all concern for the next.[1] In a more intimate vein he prepared a small document which he directed should be read at his funeral as a message of hope to the friends he left behind. It affirmed the "sure and certain hope" of the true Christian, and the Divine assurance of reunion in a better land. The beliefs thus expressed he held as irrefragable truths, things as little to be doubted as the lighthouses and breakwaters he built. He could never hold with Rabelais that the immortality of the soul is a "grand peut-être"; and lo! here was his son, the child of his affections, doing worse than the doubting Rabelais, actually denying the very fundamental doctrines of the Christian religion.

It was a stab in the heart. His health, mental and physical, suffered. He grew irritable, lost his

[1] It appeared in *Life and Work*, the official magazine of the Church of Scotland, for May 1879, and bears the initials T. S.

temper easily, and was at times so much affected he fell downright ill. At that time Louis and his cousin R. A. M. Stevenson were much together. In an outburst of anger Thomas Stevenson charged his nephew with the crime of leading Louis astray ; but, seeing the injustice of the charge, withdrew it and apologised. From Bob, however, he extracted a promise never to mention religion in Louis's presence. Between father and son the relations led to frequent scenes of violence. Financial matters were discussed, and Thomas Stevenson intimated he could never leave his money to a son who held the Tyndall–Huxley doctrines. Louis avowed with spirit that he was right, and that any person taking money in such circumstances was no better than a thief. " And a damned thief, too," was his father's trenchant comment.

To-day and in the light of after-events all this suggests a tempest in a teapot. Had Thomas Stevenson been a better psychologist, he would probably have been less pained and alarmed. For he would have seen that in essence Louis's much-paraded atheism was the mere fermentings of an uneasy egoism bent at all hazards on figuring in the limelight. Neither then nor later had Stevenson any real taste or gift for wrestling and suffering in the deep places of the soul. He was neither a Pascal nor a Newman, far less was he a Shakespeare, a Goethe, or a Carlyle, nay, save in spasms and for effect, he was not even a potential Voltaire.

The man who did more than any other to weed out his so-called " religious difficulties " was Fleeming Jenkin. The beginning of their long and fruitful friendship is worth recalling. When Louis was eighteen, Mrs. Jenkin, then a stranger in

Edinburgh, returned home after a visit to 17 Heriot Row, declaring she had discovered a new poet, "a young Heine with a Scottish accent." Next day, on her invitation, he called and was introduced to her husband. Thus began a unique and potent influence in the life of Stevenson, in some respects the most potent in his whole career.

## Going His Own Way

Among their social activities the Jenkins included amateur theatricals. Their house was turned into a private theatre, the host acting as stage-manager, and Stevenson, a professed votary of the drama, was given minor parts in several plays. His histrionic talents were negligible. According to his own account, he never spoke a line of his parts properly; but he was brought into close association with Fleeming Jenkin, a vital fact which compensated all failures as an actor. The Jenkin influence, however, was not immediate. As we have seen, Stevenson, with his usual ostentatious levity, took the Professor of Engineering as a vast joke; it may be presumed that in the beginning he took the stage-manager with an equal lack of seriousness. Not until later and after some sharp passages, in which levity was not triumphant, did the acquaintance ripen into intimacy and friendship.

Meanwhile Louis went his own way, which was as little the way of Fleeming Jenkin as of Thomas Stevenson. He was still the eager imitator; indeed, so constant and consistent were his imitations in those early years, it might seem that nature had denied him all originality—even in his vices. His particular model at that time, in conduct if

not in art, was the ill-starred Robert Fergusson, whose broken, frustrated genius drew perhaps a too generous tribute from Burns. Fergusson was the avowed laureate of low life, and according to his biographers died of debauchery at three-and-twenty. By some mental twist, some secret effluence of sympathy and admiration, Stevenson believed himself to be a reincarnation of Fergusson, " a boy so wild," he remarked comparatively late in life. " Of such a mixed strain, so unfortunate, and, as I always felt, so like myself." Such fantasies breed a species of fatalism ; and, indeed, we impinge here on the sphere of morbid psychology, that obscure pathological element which, as science is now discovering, actuates or accompanies all forms of mental and moral aberration. Stevenson being (as he believed) a reincarnation of Fergusson, it followed, by all the laws governing such cases, he must, willy-nilly, do as Fergusson did.

And Fergusson lived the life he sang. The scenes in " Johnnie Dowie's Tavern " and elsewhere, which he depicts with a realism and humour not unworthy of Hogarth, were real ; so, alas ! were " the blinkin' " and " the bleerin' " eyes of the " couthy chields " who enjoyed the revels. Of those " couthy chields " Fergusson himself was one of the most abandoned ; and the result was madness and death at twenty-three. Human experience proves that profligacy has charms for multitudes who are not inherently profligate. As Byron shrewdly observed, " Many people have the reputation of being wicked with whom we should be glad to pass our lives." A morbid fascination, the result partly of fancied kinship, partly of other circumstances then malignly at work, incited Stevenson to emulation of his model. The respect-

able world about him was censorious and hypocritical. Well! he would prove, at least to himself, how utterly he disdained that world and its opinion. He would taste and test life, as his spiritual and poetic progenitor had tasted and tested it; and he did, with an abandon which that progenitor, in his days of flesh, might have been proud to celebrate. The adventures were, of course, strictly clandestine. It was never his habit to go about seeking counsel; and in present enterprises, it may be supposed, he would have even less disposition than usual to consult parents and friends. Occasionally some fellow-Bohemian, sworn to secrecy, bore him company; but generally he went to his pleasures alone.

In later days at Vailima a member of his family complained, half in jest, half in earnest, that Louis was "very secretive"; and for all his seeming candour, his eternal eagerness to talk of himself and his doings, the judgment is true. He could be secretive, as secretive, in fact, as the proverbial oyster, and sometimes his reticence was deepest when he seemed to pour out the whole contents of his heart unreservedly. But he is not wholly nor even chiefly responsible for the veilings, the distortions and suppressions of the essential facts in that part of his career. Compared with some who have written of him, with a fine air of candour and knowledge, he was ingenuousness itself.

## A New Stevenson

Reference has already been made to the recent discovery of a large mass of material which, until it was sprung on the market, was not known to

exist. For making that material available for the purposes of biography we are indebted to Mr. George S. Hellman, of New York and the Bibliophile Society of Boston. In a magazine article[1] Mr. Hellman has given a lucid account of the manner in which he came to make the discovery. Stevenson had preserved a large body of work, both in prose and verse ; a great part of it written in his early Edinburgh days and illustrating his mode of life at that time. Much of it, however, was of a character which might seem to challenge or contradict the popular conception of Stevenson as man and writer. Stevenson himself obviously meant it to be published, and even made preparations for publication. But Mrs. Stevenson, who appears to have been very much in control, decided it would be too hazardous a venture to give such matter to the public.

Accordingly for more than twenty years it was kept secret. At Stevenson's death it became the property of his widow ; at her death it passed to her daughter, Mrs. Isobel Strong, later Mrs. Salisbury Field ; and from her hands it found its way into a New York sale-room. By great good fortune the purchaser was Mr. Hellman, who in 1915 edited for the Bibliophile Society, with an introduction and detailed notes, the two volumes of hitherto unpublished Stevenson poems, which have more recently been reissued under the title of *New Poems*, and who, in conjunction with Professor W. P. Trent, of Columbia University, and Mr. H. H. Harper, of Boston, issued in 1921, again for the Bibliophile Society,

[1] *The Century*, December 1922. This was the first important attempt on the part of an American scholar towards full clarification of the Stevenson myth.

four additional volumes of entirely new material both in verse and in prose. To Mr. Hellman's great courtesy I owe the opportunity of examining those volumes, and to them I am indebted for invaluable information on a period of Stevenson's life which has been zealously obscured and misrepresented. I am further indebted to Mr. Hellman for information regarding matters which the published works do not illustrate or illuminate.

Mrs. Stevenson's motives for concealing so much valuable biographical matter are not beyond conjecture. Mr. Hellman believes she was engaged in " the gentle and genteel art of myth-making." In other words, she was protecting and preserving a reputation. Those intimate and all-too-suggestive effusions might shock the good people who, with all the implicit faith of trusting innocence, had accepted the cherub ideal in all its beautiful and blameless integrity. Especially might it be offended by the evidence of amatory adventures, worthier surely of a Burns or a Byron in his hours of licence, than of the Covenanting Louis Stevenson. He was thought rather to shun than seek the society of women. On that point, indeed, it was reported (and believed) he was so shrinkingly timid that it was with extreme reluctance he admitted a petticoat into his books. The Pope himself could not be more chary of the sex ; so that, as an adoring critic was moved to observe, " If his art suffered from his virtue, his character remained the purer." The doctrine that virtue is the enemy of art is wholly exhilarating, though not without its moral and its warning to certain artists, who cannot see that vice *per se* is an essential ingredient in true art.

Mrs. Stevenson knew better than ignorant, purblind worshippers ; but would it be wise, would it be safe, to disturb their doting faith ? Possibly an element of jealousy got mixed with her prudence. Those early loves, those secret disreputable philanderings ! Umph ! One can picture the black brows contracting in a frown and the firm mouth shutting with the decisiveness of a steel trap. But behind all was a sound business reason. When he was alive and producing, Stevenson, being a professional author and not a mere amateur dabbler in letters, had to live by his pen, that is to say, by the suffrages of the public he had so long and ardently wooed and at last won so triumphantly. To outrage the taste of the public to which he had endeared himself by indiscreet disclosures might well seem to his eminently practical wife to be wantonly courting ruin. In his later years, at any rate, he had an expensive establishment to maintain, and it was only by appearing faithful to those who were faithful to him that maintenance was possible. When he died the need of discretion was rather increased than diminished. Mrs. Stevenson, who never lacked a shrewd sense of " the paying proposition," saw all these things clearly and decided for secrecy and suppression. But the result was unfortunate, since it tended to perpetuate the myth described by Mr. Hellman, and as a consequence to obscure, if not actually obliterate, the real Stevenson.

His own plea, as made in his earlier confessions, was that he was forced to keep low company because he could not afford better. " I was always poor," he explains, as though poverty and decency were for ever incompatible. True, his private allowance was not extravagant. Scottish fathers are disposed

to be less lavish with pocket-money to their boys than English or American, and Thomas Stevenson kept a thrifty hold on his purse-strings. Louis began with half a crown a week, subsequently increased to £1 per month, that rate continuing till he was three-and-twenty. There were secret raids on his mother, but even with the additions thus secured the total would make an English public-school boy or University student smile in pity. Yet it was larger than the allowance made to many youths of his age and class who did not make meagre pocket-money an excuse for seeking vicious company. "I was the companion of seamen, chimney-sweeps, and thieves," he relates, not without a touch of swagger.

A favourite resort was a "howff," or night-club, close by Calton Hill which was much patronised—in secret—by devotees of pleasure, military and naval officers, sprigs of the law and their avid copyists among the young bloods of Edinburgh. The "howff" enjoyed much police attention, but elaborate precautions were taken against surprise visits. One who remembers it has described to me the small flap in the locked inner door which was utilised for the inspection of any suspected person seeking admittance, and the admirable concord of surprise and indignation from habitués when the law dared to suspect them of nefarious practices.

Louis had other resorts in which the pleasure-seekers were grievously chivied by the police; and everywhere ladies beamed in all the bloom of crude paint, all the jollity of bad liquor. In most of those haunts the *tout ensemble* was perhaps just a grade above that immortalised in Burns's "Jolly Beggars," only with city refinements and

sophistications unknown in the circle of " Pousie Nancy." To the gay, dishevelled, disreputable crew Stevenson, as he tells us, was known as " Velvet-coat," and it is easily believed that he was immensely popular. In general society his position was one of " miserable isolation " ; but with those boon companions he was as friendly as ever was Tam O' Shanter with Soutar Johnny, and for a similar reason.

> Tam lo'ed him like a very brither.
> They had been fou for weeks thegither.

Surely the most delicious reason ever given for devoted affection, and, it may be added, one that is typical of Scotland.

" I was distinctly petted," Stevenson recalled with relish, the women in particular being " most kind and gentle." Sometimes, while the fun with others " grew fast and furious," he sat in a corner writing poetry in a copy-book ; but it was not as an embryo poet he was made one of the elect. If a novelist must qualify for writing of low life by first living it, then Robert Louis Stevenson must have been one of the most highly qualified novelists of his generation. Burns frankly confessed a " sneaking fondness for the company of black-guards." At that time Stevenson certainly displayed and indulged a similar taste.

To make incongruity more incongruous, the " religious difficulties " continued unabated. Thus, while the people at 17 Heriot Row brooded and grieved over backsliding and infidelity, the backslider and infidel was passing delectable hours with his seamen, chimney-sweeps, thieves, and their kind and gentle womenfolk. There is some-

thing grotesquely ironical in the situation ; some may even find in it an unmistakable foretaste of Jekyll and Hyde.

Let me here state explicitly that, in narrating the events of the period we have now reached, I desire to avoid censoriousness, which, as Stevenson himself was to exemplify, is so easy and withal so apt to be unjust. " To know all is to forgive all," says the French proverb ; and I believe there have been few men of letters in recent times to whom that sage and penetrating adage applies with more fitness than to Robert Louis Stevenson. Fortunately for us all, the final question is not how much there is to blame, but how much there may be to praise ; and at the Grand Assize the Supreme Judge's " Well done ! " may be bestowed more warmly on some who have been guilty of great sins than on many who have been negatively righteous. My task, at all events, is not to sit in judgment, neither is it to point a moral, though if the facts be truly presented, the moral will not be lacking. To peep and pry into the dark corners of the life of man or woman merely to gratify the prurient-minded is a despicable business and one which in no circumstances whatever would I undertake.

Usually it would not be worth while. In the case of ordinary men, both the good and the evil they do are buried with them and soon forgotten. A kindly Oblivion takes them to herself in eternal forgetfulness. It is otherwise with those who in any way play memorable parts on the world's stage, especially such as leave permanent memorials for the benefit and the pleasure of mankind. One of the penalties of fame is that it destroys privacy. The famous man is public property, and the public,

having, so to speak, paid its money, has a natural and legitimate desire to learn the facts of his career and character—in the old phrase, to know what manner of man he is. No reader of sense, certainly none who has any knowledge of the world and human life, will expect him to be perfect. In the end it is the balance of qualities, debit or credit, that matters. If Robert Louis Stevenson in his youth sowed wild oats with a somewhat lavish hand, did not Augustine and certain other eminent saints do the same? Even Wordsworth, as we have lately been discovering, had incidents in his early life which make the moralist blush for the aberrations of human nature, and a little also for its hypocrisies. Yet who is to be the judge? In all such matters—

> One part must still be greatly dark.
> The moving why they do it?

That momentous "why?" is the grand crux in conduct; and the professed moralist is of all people perhaps least qualified to solve and explain its mystery. In trying to understand Robert Louis Stevenson, several vital influences which do not always operate in men's lives have to be borne in mind.

Two main factors dominate and determine human destiny—heredity and environment, in other words, "tendency" and the impact of circumstance. The first, being basic, aboriginal, nourishing the roots and setting the springs of temperament and character, is the cardinal and elemental force. In the most literal sense "the dead still rule our spirits from their urns." The second, while external and seemingly accidental,

is nevertheless vitally potent, to shape, control, and even coerce. When by a happy chance the two forces operate with some degree of unison, harmonious development, which in essence is happiness, may be predicated for the individual. When, as so often happens, particularly when there is any special gift, any departure from the normal, they clash and oppose, then there is peril of disaster and tragedy.

We have seen the many contradictory elements which were blended in Stevenson's ancestry, elements of which he was himself unaware, though as agents of fate they moved and worked strongly in his blood. To appreciate their full effect—that is, to see and understand Robert Louis Stevenson as he appeared to his fellow-citizens in Edinburgh while he was still among them—it is necessary to glance briefly at the society into which, as by a satiric freak of destiny, he was cast.

## Victorian Religiosity

The unctuous smugness of the mid-Victorian era has often been remarked. Carlyle in apocalyptic style might cry " woe, woe," might denounce shams and simulacra, invoke the Eternal Verities and point menacingly to Avernus ; he was but a voice crying in the wilderness. Matthew Arnold's stall-fed, self-righteous Philistine possessed the field and pocketed the revenues, with a grand air of patronising High Providence. Church and State were vastly at ease in a Zion of roast beef and port wine, lapsing, though they did not know it, into the lethargy of fatty degeneration. There were

little wars in the Crimea, in India, in Africa, but, despite the agitations of Florence Nightingale and others, they were mere splashes or ripples on the calm of a measureless sea of peace. Beyond the Atlantic Lincoln was gloriously fighting the battle of freedom, and England, strangely blind, found the hydra-struggle no more than " the burning of a dirty chimney." As yet there were no premonitions of the Great War, which, like a universal earthquake, was to make havoc of pharasaical creeds and smooth prophecies, by tearing up foundations that were thought to be, like the hills, everlasting. South of the Tweed an inert religion dozed supinely on forms and ceremonies, on Church Congresses, on saccharine assurances of the universal brotherhood of man and the imminent advent of the millennium. Like the master satirists they are, Time and Fate have shown how much those predictions and assurances were worth.

North of the Tweed, where character shares the austerities of nature, an obstinate Calvinism still pervaded the land like an atmosphere. Sunday was a day of high penance, as if the sins of six days were to be expiated in a batch by intensified self-torment on the seventh. " Truly the Phariseean Sabbath and mode of disarming Almighty wrath by something better than the *sécret pour lui plaire* is getting quite odious to me," wrote Carlyle. All manner of recreation was forbidden, and the family, sternly summoned by its head, devoted itself gloomily to a contemplation of the Wrath to come. Everywhere the Shorter Catechism, that ingeniously-devised metaphysical torture of Scottish youth, was brought forth for the study and recitation of the terrors of eternal punishment. Laugh-

ter, joy, gaiety were frowned down as blasphemous indecencies. Saturday night might and did resound with "Willie Brewed a Peck O' Maut," with the exhilarating sentiment "Freedom and whisky gang thegither, tak' aff yer dram," and its inevitable and delicious accompaniment that—

> The sweetest hours that e'er I spent
> Were spent among the lasses O.

But the Sabbath must be observed with the lowering countenance of doom. Minatory prayers and hour-long sermons, reeking of the pit, crowned the dismal experience. And at last the day of dread ended, sensitive, imaginative children lay down shuddering (if they were not already exhausted by terror) to draw the bedclothes over their heads in order to hide from an angry avenging Deity. In that sulphurous, overcharged atmosphere the God of Love was hardly ever allowed to show His face. It was always the God who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay."

In all this the enlightened reader, living outside the bounds of Scotland, perceives something of black fanaticism, something, it may be, of pharasaical hypocrisy. I beg of him not to judge too hastily, nor forget the binding compelling force of tradition. The spirit of John Knox and the Covenanters was still potent, though mercifully softened by the large humanity of Burns. "The Twa Herds," "The Kirk's Alarm," and similar pieces pricked some portentous bubbles and freed the inhibited, imprisoned spirit of laughter. Still more pointedly "Holy Willie's Prayer" struck at the very roots of Calvinism, satirising it with a deadliness of effect probably unparalleled in literature.

The snake, however, was scotched, not killed. Lamed and maimed, the stricken creed nevertheless survived to remind all whom it might concern that there was still " a hangman's whip " for the rebel and the backslider. It was never the religion of the heart or the imagination ; some critics hold it is not even the religion of reason. But it was fixed in the heart's core of the Scottish people, often driven home by sword or pike, and abode there like a king in his citadel, assailed yet defying assaults.

We peep here into the deep well of psychology which determines the character as well as the conduct of a nation. With a perfervid, often a flaming, love of Liberalism, the Scot is yet an ingrained Conservative ; so that Jenny Geddes and her stool become to him a sacred religious symbol. " What ! " cried Jenny, or another, in the High Kirk of St. Giles, " say mass at my lug ? " And whiz went the stool, marking an epoch in the religious history of Scotland. Jenny had many doughty followers, so many that Calvin remained and remains regnant. Thus it came that, in the midtime of Victoria, what had been continued in essentials to be. It was, in fact, an era of hard creeds, hard drinking, and amazing laxities, of grim piety, and immoralities so gross that at times the records of the Registrar-General read like summaries of pornographic novels. Into that queer, anomalous element of piety, gloom, drink, and lubricity was thrust the gay, elfish, scoffing, laughing author of *The New Arabian Nights*. The incongruity is glaring. Puck in such a situation could scarcely have been less in his element ; and what would certainly have befallen Puck actually did befall Robert Louis Stevenson.

One effect was a sense of dreadful isolation. He was unutterably, pathetically lonely. In early youth he had not, so far as I can discover, a single friend of real intimacy, that is, one with whom he could unreservedly exchange confidences and be sure of understanding. Hence he was thrown back on himself, made introspective, secretive, and furtive. Besides, there can be little doubt he was beginning to be conscious of what Cleopatra in the crisis of her fate calls "immortal longings," the longings, in his case, of a vague, uneasy, but very real ambition, and a curiosity regarding things which had not yet "swum within his ken."

One of his favourite diversions was to hang about the North Bridge to watch the southern-bound trains and picture to himself the land of romance, of sunshine, of wonder and bustle whither they were bound. Other imaginative boys have done the same, and taking heart from the faculty of self-help, have gone forth into that wonderland. He was fond, also, of going off by himself to the Calton Cemetery and there brooding and moping miserably. There is no reason whatever to doubt that those moods and yearnings were perfectly genuine, and, being so, they may be taken as deeply symptomatic. There was something, something shadowy, ill-defined even to himself, which Edinburgh could not and did not give him, and he was miserable. Morally, at least, it would have been good for him just then had he been compelled to earn his living by sheer hard, practical work, as other youths, other authors have had to do. But he had long hours of idleness and vacancy, with the boredom, the *ennui*, the temptations which are the inevitable result. Edinburgh was dull, uncongenial, censorious in

its methods, and as he thought, hypocritical in its practice. He bore for a little while and then openly revolted.

The immediate effect was to make his isolation in society more decisive and desolate. Even such friends and acquaintances as he had forsook him—with one notable exception. It is related that the prudes and Holy Willies of Dumfries passed Burns in the street with uplifted noses and averted eyes, because he was not as they were. In his native Edinburgh, Robert Louis Stevenson had the same humiliating experience. Some old people who clearly remember the circumstances inform me that he was regarded as a social pariah. Charity might suppose him mad and therefore irresponsible; but puritanic convention could not condone his conduct. In plain language he was ostracised. "People just turned their backs on him," one informant told me. "Not that they were squeamish, but they had their own reputations to think of." Their own reputations to think of! Has prudence ever shone with a more celestial light? To be seen with Louis Stevenson was to be suspect, nay, to be already defiled by touching pitch. Some of his characteristic outbursts, and especially certain passages in his famous Damien letter are to be traced back to his own bitter experiences at that time and the cankering thoughts they left. Like corrosive acid they burned into his very soul, leaving a fierce hatred of sanctimonious hypocrisy, a fierce contempt for the cautious, calculating self-interest which does the seemingly right, not because it is beautiful or virtuous, but solely because it pays. It was in that spirit of scorn he stigmatised Respectability as "the deadbest gag and wet-blanket that can be laid on a

man," as in a yet bitterer spirit of both scorn and revolt he wrote :

> O fine, religious, decent folk
> In virtues flaunting gold and scarlet,
> I sneer between two puffs of smoke,
> Give me the publican and harlot.

Meanwhile condemnation, derision, desertion, acting not as deterrents but as irritants and incentives, sent him the more swiftly along the downward slopes of the primrose path. Puritanical Edinburgh, affecting virtues it did not possess, might elevate its eyebrows and shake its sapient head in horror. He did not care. He would go his own way, and he did, with an exhilarating air of disdain and defiance.

## The Highland Lassie

In their love-affairs men of genius are very much as ordinary mortals—save in one important particular. The genius may, and often does, confer immortality on his mistress ; and thereby unfolds and illustrates his own character. Catulus has made Lesbia immortal, and in so doing has revealed himself. Burns's Jean, Mary, and Peggy will live as long as literature, and serve as a perpetual glass in which the world may behold their lover. Stevenson, somewhat more reticent or, it may be, less gifted than some of his predecessors in the amatory art, has not conferred a like brilliant distinction either on his " Claire " or others that followed her, so that they do not serve so effectually as a mirror in which posterity may see their lover. Some who pretend to unfold his intimate

life take no note either of " Claire " or of certain successors, an omission due perhaps to ignorance, perhaps to something else ; others pass them by with a murmur of mingled astonishment and disapproval and a childish reference to " innocent Bohemianism," while some would deny their very existence. Such questionable persons must always be a disconcerting fact in the history of a saint, or at any rate one posed as a model for ingenuous youth.

Unfortunately for the myth-makers, Stevenson himself is a witness against them. As has already been noted, it was only by chance that even he was allowed to speak and reveal something of his real life and emotions at a time of stress and passion. But he has spoken, and the graven image of the idolaters is not merely defeatured, it is shivered to atoms. Henley was right ; their Stevenson is not the Stevenson of reality at all. After all the evasions, distortions, suppressions, and mawkish insincerities, the fresh material rescued by Mr. Hellman and made accessible by the Bibliophile Society of Boston comes like a searchlight disclosing a mass of sedulously-hidden truths. I may say that several people still alive knew a great deal about the youthful Stevenson's escapades, his unhappiness in Edinburgh and its causes, but for most part either remained silent or merely hinted their knowledge. To them recent revelations have been no surprise ; indeed, to some of them the question was, how long would disclosures be delayed ? Now they feel at liberty to speak more freely, and to them I am indebted for many particulars not included even in the newly-discovered matter, yet harmonising with and supplementing it. In no case has there been contradiction. That

matter is a most illuminative guide to the realities of Stevenson's student days, when he was thought by innocent people to have been wholly engrossed in religion. It is all valuable ; but, as Mr. Hellman justly remarks, it is " especially in the lyrics of tempestuous youth that the poet speaks to, as well as out of, his own heart." The whole is a priceless piece of self-revelation.

Several of Stevenson's early loves are mirrored there. " Claire," the first and perhaps the chief of them, appears to-day a dim, shrouded figure, hovering ghost-like on the edge of the vanished past, but refusing, as it were, to go. In the early seventies, however, she walked the streets of Edinburgh a creature of indubitable flesh and blood ; and for Stevenson a very vital, very passionate reality. Mr. Hellman thinks we shall never know positively who she was.[1] Her identity, indeed, her looks, her manner, her warm, breathing essential self we cannot now recover. Time has swallowed her, gently, compassionately, obliterating alike her failings and virtues. Yet because of him certain memories of her remain. It may be stated with certainty that she did not appear at church meetings nor in polite drawing-rooms, and was in no way whatever *persona grata* to that superior, respectable section of society which Stevenson, largely for her sake, defied and contemned.

Her name, I have been able to discover was not " Claire," that being in the most literal sense a *nom de guerre*. She was a Highland girl and her name was Highland, Kate Drummond. Have

[1] Since writing his article on " The Stevenson Myth " he has " been informed on good authority that ' Claire ' was the daughter of a blacksmith." As we shall see, however, Mr. Hellman's authority has misled him.

we here a possible and partial explanation of Stevenson's love for the Highlands and his eagerness to establish a Highland ancestry? It is not at all unlikely. The acquaintance began dubiously enough in the purlieus of Calton Hill and Leith Street, a notorious quarter in those days. An eminent Scottish judge has recently described the changes which have taken place in Edinburgh within his memory. "People of the present day can hardly realise," he writes, "what I quite well remember, that fifty years ago there was open vice in Edinburgh flaunted in the public gaze. There were certain streets within two hundred yards of Princes Street in which a number of houses were as openly and distinctly houses of ill-fame as certain shops in Lady Lawson Street are now old-furniture shops."[1] That was the Edinburgh that in holy rage judged and condemned Robert Louis Stevenson for loose living.

How "Claire" drifted into its disreputable haunts from the purity of the Highlands may be conjectured, but is not known. Probably hers was the old story of a beautiful girlhood, a betrayal of innocence, and a tragic end. That she brought with her into those noisome dens something of the charm of her race, something of the pure air and wholesomeness of her native hills, there is every reason to believe. In all likelihood she had little or nothing in common with those about her, those with whom she was forced to associate—except misfortune. She was very young, and is reported to have been noted for her beauty. She has been described to me by one who saw her as slim and dark, very trim and neat, with jet-black hair and a complexion that needed no cosmetics to make it

[1] Lord Sands in the *Juridical Review*, June 1923.

rosy and alluring. Stevenson was scarcely twenty at the time of their meeting—which was as casual as such meetings are apt to be. The result was a passionate love-romance, as passionate, perhaps, as anything in the annals of literature. In his famous sonnet, now threadbare by much repetition, W. E. Henley, who knew the young Stevenson to the core, wrote of "the lover and the sensualist." The description is not untrue. Yet it would be an utter mistake to suppose that the attraction for Louis just then in the Edinburgh underworld was wholly or mainly physical and sensual.

What quality, what feminine grace and charm in "Claire" caught and held his roving and rather volatile affection? In those sordid resorts there were other girls, unblushing "daughters of Venus," ready enough with their appeal to primitive man, and some of them did Stevenson a lasting injury. But "Claire" alone inspired and kept his love. What did he find in her? Was she clever? Did she alone understand and appreciate him? Did she alone give him the sympathy which is more than wine to the weary and meat to the starving? Had she the indefinable *something* which his questing, dissatisfied heart craved? When others were contemptuous and disparaging or downright hostile, when his father scowled and his mother shed tears of despair over him, did he fly to the arms of "Claire" as to a sure refuge? Certainly he went to her arms. She may well have been his "chum," his confidante, his inspirer, for just then he had no other.

Possibly, too, she told him Highland stories, with the quaint, rich turns of phrase and the soft musical cadence which are the heritage of the Gael—stories of Highland clans, of lost causes and impossible

loyalties, of love, daring, and adventure, which both melted and fired. And she may also have sung to him (for they were much together) some of the haunting songs of her girlhood, to be echoed later in " Over the Sea to Skye " and other pieces. A notable characteristic of genius is its extreme sensitiveness to impressions and its extraordinary eagerness of response when impressed. Moreover, there were doubtless many hours when, like Scott's romantic outlaw, she purposely forgot what once she was nor thought what she was now, and that then she rose into real comradeship ; or, what is perhaps more likely, she may have been just soft and clinging, with an infinite capacity for admiration and hero-worship. Whatever her qualities, graces, and disposition, she touched a deep responsive chord in her lover's heart. Some of the poems which he was so assiduously writing in copy-books were addressed to her or commemorated the happiness she gave him. In one significant piece there are allusions to a child which was never born, and in fact, if " Claire " did not set him beside Burns and Byron in the " Poetica Erotica " of his country, she gave him many hours of ardent, headlong passion.

Let me repeat a warning against misconception and injustice. Because the surroundings were sordid and degrading, it would be an entire error to conclude that the relations of Louis and " Claire " were necessarily of the same character. There is clear evidence, indeed, to the contrary. " Claire " was doubtless an " unfortunate," a " poor windle straw on the roaring pool of time " ; but in misfortune she must have preserved something of native sweetness and goodness, something peculiar to herself and in no way part of her environment.

It is possible she even saved her lover from worse things—from the fate, for instance, which overtook his model Fergusson—that, discerning something of his gifts and his better nature, she set herself in that murky atmosphere to protect him. A woman's love and devotion are capable of such things. Possibly, too, she thought that by clinging to him she could save herself, escape from the polluting influences under which she had fallen. There are not wanting signs that she still kept some of the ideals of her girlhood in the Highlands, and in her heart adored the purity she had lost. Such things happen.

Happily, human nature is never so corrupt or debased that it does not cherish somewhere in its heart of hearts a sincere reverence for the good and beautiful. " Claire " had tripped, and was paying the penalty which falls so heavily on a woman ; but it is clear that her better nature, sustained, perhaps, by memories of home and girlhood, struggled on. That she gave her heart to Stevenson with the abandon of an all-possessing passion is beyond doubt, a fact which in itself furnishes proof that her innate goodness had not perished. For his sake she offered to give up the life she was living. I have been told that she was many times scolded by " the head of her establishment " for wasting so much time in his company, and at last actually beaten. The house in which the chastisement is said to have been given was pointed out to me by one who is well acquainted with Stevenson's early history.

And on his part Stevenson was at least equally passionate. He proposed to marry " Claire " ; but unluckily he had no money, and the door of 17 Heriot Row was inexorably shut against her.

Inevitably it had to be so. After all, a man be he ever so sincere and chivalrous, can scarcely go out into the street and pick up a bride as he might pick up a lost and soiled pearl. The experience burned into Stevenson's heart and for a little threatened to make havoc of his life. With a heartbroken "My God!" Claire went her own way and Louis went his. To the novelist, looking back and thinking of what had been, it must often have seemed that here was a "human document," a page, so to speak, of life in the raw, which might very effectively be utilised for the purposes of his art. And, indeed, there is some evidence, on the authority of Henry James, that he did so utilise it, though, for reasons on which I have already touched, the result never saw the light of publication.

Meanwhile to those at 17 Heriot Row the revelation of those illicit associations came as a stunning, shattering disaster. The religious apostasy had seemed a grave enough scandal, had caused, in fact, excruciating anguish, but this unequivocal piece of "loose living" was the last straw in a burden too grievous to be borne. Probably nothing but the peculiar circumstances of the case saved the offender. He was an only son, an only child; he was in feeble health; he was the apple of his mother's eye—his mother, indeed, must have pleaded for him piteously; finally, and perhaps most important of all in influencing the decision, there was the very potent fear that if thrust out-of-doors he would go headlong to Avernus. Thomas Stevenson's forbearance in that crisis was a triumph of self-control, of affection, and, let it be added, of practical Christianity. "Thou shalt forgive thy brother, not seven times, but seventy times seven." And if thy brother, how much more thine only son?

To the couple at 17 Heriot Row the expulsion of Louis would have been as the tearing-out and casting-away of their own lacerated hearts. The matter was smoothed over, as such family quarrels are. But it may be said that Stevenson's absences from home about that time are not to be explained by religious differences or ill health. Neither was the poverty which then and later astonished innocent people due to paternal parsimony. It was very specifically due to paternal discipline. In previous disagreements and disappointments Thomas Stevenson had yielded, partly from affection and the desire to please, partly for the sake of appearances. But his patience and his generosity were both exhausted. With an arbitrariness which is not at all surprising, he refused to contribute to " a rake's progress."

In Stevenson the reaction was acute and prostrating. He sank into a mood of deep depression. The world had lost all its sunshine and he had lost all that was worth winning. In that tragic mood we get a glimpse of him in the little poem which he calls " The Vanquished Knight " :

> I have left all upon the shameful field,
> Honour and Hope, My God ! and all but life.

And since life was valueless, he prayed that it too might be taken. As he grew a little calmer, realising, in his own words, that he had " lived and loved and closed the door," he wrote, in a little paper discovered after his death, that he could see his future life flowing stiller and stiller year by year. He had even some hope of quiet content, though the dreams of glory and happiness had vanished. " As I am glad to say," he recorded

sadly, " that I do now recognise that I shall never be a great man, I may set myself peacefully on a smaller journey, not without hope of coming to the inn before nightfall." The date of that little document is April 1873, when he was four months past his twenty-second birthday.

By that time " Claire " had passed out of his life for ever. But his heart mourned and he could ask pitifully—

> The relic taken, what avails the shrine ?

Later in his dreams he was to see his old love coming to meet him " in the dawning and the dew," and his heart sprang up at the vision. " Claire " was gone, rather she was thrust away, torn from him in the height of his passion and hers. It was impossible he should forget her, and he did not forget her any more than Burns forgot Clarinda.

## CHAPTER VI

### New Associations

While these and other adventures yet to be described were in progress Stevenson was nominally a law student. For the sake of appearances he made a pretence of covering the usual course. He attended law lectures intermittently and as it suited him, rubbed up his neglected Latin with tutors, dipped into legal textbooks, and even gained a second-class certificate for an essay in the class of political economy. But from the first he must have had a lurking consciousness that the law was not to be his profession. At any rate his real work, his real interest, lay in the severe self-imposed training in literary craftsmanship. There his zeal and energy never abated—even in the time of "Claire." He still continued to "live with words." Looking back years afterwards, he perceived radical defects in his system. It taught him, as he came to see, merely "the lower and less intellectual elements of the literary art; the choice of the essential note and the right word, things that to a happier constitution had perhaps come by nature." As regards training, he recognised in it one grave defect, that it set him no standard of achievement. That was an after-discovery. At the time his zeal as a "sedulous ape" blinded him to any defects in his system. It gave him "practice in rhythm, in harmony and

the co-ordination of parts," but it scarcely touched the higher elements of his art. He had still to discover the great secret that in creative work everything ultimately depends on imagination, a master-faculty in which Stevenson was not richly endowed. In his early efforts, indeed, it is almost entirely lacking. But in technique—and without technique there can be no real art—he was making steady progress, though then and for a considerable time afterwards his style was vitiated by an affected quaintness, an inordinate desire to be pretty and decorative.

It helped him that he was moving a little out of his " miserable isolation " and making friends. Among those who came to cheer him then were his cousin " Bob " (R. A. M. Stevenson) and Charles Baxter, both considerable influences in his life. Bob had been his playmate in childhood, but had gone off to the Continent to prepare for the career of an artist. Now he returned bringing with him, as Thomas Stevenson in a moment of exasperation thought, a taint or more than a taint of French atheism. To Louis he came as an avatar of liberty. " The mere return of Bob," Stevenson tells in a fragment of autobiography written when he was thirty, " changed at once and for ever the course of my life. I can give you an idea of my relief by saying that I was at last able to breathe." He describes his previous condition as one of " astounding misery." But with the exuberant Bob as companion and confidant something like real boyish joy came to him. His heart was " like a bird's " and he was " done with the sullens for good."

According to the accounts of his friends, R. A. M. Stevenson was a striking personality, with a genius for true Bohemianism which his cousin Louis never

had. Educated in England, first at Windermere School and then at Sidney Sussex (Oliver Cromwell's old college) at Cambridge, he subsequently studied painting at Antwerp, Paris, and elsewhere in France, and for a short time was Professor of Fine Art in Liverpool University. He was ardent, copious, captious, ingenuous, intolerant, yet courteous and well-bred. Henley describes him as an "exorbitant and amazing person," but one ever making for what was best both in art and in morals. I have myself come upon traces of his work and influence in London which confirm the judgments of both Stevenson and Henley. In talk he dominated Louis; in practice he taught him much of the ways of the world and joined him heart and soul in deriding Edinburgh, with its smug conceits and benighted parochialism. Moreover, he more than any other brought Louis under the French influences which were to have so deep an effect both on his work and his character.

The second friend, Charles Baxter, was, as has already been mentioned, a lawyer, a Writer to the Signet, which in Scotland is a solicitor of superior professional standing. There are three grades. Writer to the Signet, Solicitor to the Supreme Court, and plain solicitor, distinctions which pertinently illustrate the Scottish pride in precedence and prestige. Baxter knew Stevenson more intimately and thoroughly than anyone else, with the single exception, perhaps, of W. E. Henley; and the letters addressed to him are the best in the whole Stevenson collection, because they are by far the frankest. Reserve, evasion, suppression, with Charles Baxter would have been too much of a jest.

It is customary for intending advocates at the

Scottish Bar to take a practical course in a solicitor's office. In 1871, in accordance with that custom, Stevenson entered the office of Skene, Edwards, and Bilton, Writers to the Signet, where he attended with his usual irregularity till 1873. The firm still survives and flourishes though in other premises, but of Stevenson's work with it no relic or trace is discoverable. It is remembered he was there; that is all. The chief partner, W. F. Skene, was and is well known as the author of *Celtic Scotland*, a work which is still valued by students of Scottish history. But of his pupil, who was also interested in the Highlands, he appears to have seen little or nothing, nor in that pupil's Celtic researches is there any trace of his influence. The two worked and lived under the same roof; but otherwise they were strangers to each other. When Stevenson became famous, Mr. Skene regretted he had not seen more of the young law student whose tastes in some directions were so similar to his own; but by that time Stevenson had left Edinburgh and Scotland for ever.

The law did not displace authorship, and a scientific paper on "The Thermal Influences of Forests" belongs to that period. It was printed in the *Proceedings of the Royal Scottish Society of Arts*, and has been considered of sufficient interest to be included in his collected works. While President of the Speculative Society in 1872 he spent part of March and April at Dunblane, and from there wrote one of his most amusing letters to Charles Baxter, who as secretary was plaguing him with business matters connected with that office. The "Spec" and its secretary could go "hang." "The affair," he adds gaily, "is in the hands of the police. Do you hear that, you evildoer?" He

ends with an invitation, "Come hither, come hither, come hither"; and gives orders concerning the purchase of books and tobacco.

In July he was seized with a desire to take a course at a German University with Sir Walter Simpson, son of the famous Sir James, the discoverer of chloroform. At his mother's request, however, the project was abandoned and the two friends went off by themselves to Brussels and Frankfort. The trip included for Stevenson a visit to Baden-Baden with his parents and a walking tour in the Black Forest. He was then learning German, and for a little while was enthusiastic over Goethe, whom later he disparaged with little enough sense or understanding. In September he was at Boulogne on his way home, and there wrote an exceedingly clever rhyming epistle to Charles Baxter, somewhat in the spirit and manner of Burns.

All the while his ardour for literature and the literary calling grew with ever-increasing intensity. That ardour was all the more remarkable since the atmosphere in which he strove and experimented was not one to quicken the sensibilities or fire the imagination. In the eighteenth century Edinburgh had won for herself the proud title of the "Modern Athens." Her philosophers and men of letters enjoyed European reputations. But when Stevenson was serving his ardent apprenticeship, the glory of Hume and Robertson had long departed. Their successors, Jeffrey, Brougham, Lockhart, the men of the *Edinburgh Review* and *Maga*, had "ta'en their wages" and gone home. The burly, boisterous Christopher North of what have been called "the drunken, blustering Noctes Ambrosianæ" had passed on his resounding way into the Eternal

Silence. His son-in-law, the gifted, versatile Aytoun, memorable as the author of " The Lays of the Scottish Cavaliers," followed soon. Hugh Miller, ex-stonemason and bank-clerk of Cromarty, deranged by sectarian controversies, had also departed tragically. The ever-beloved John Brown of *Pet Marjorie* fame, the friend of Thackeray and Ruskin, survived till Stevenson was thirty-two, a familiar figure in Princes Street with his dogs and his old-world courtesies. But he too belonged to the past.

Carlyle, greatest by far of them all, had long been in London, famous and honoured as the head of British literature. He also had tried Edinburgh and found it dreary and dispiriting. " A great stupidity reigns in this place," he notes in his diary under date 1833. The men are described as " a barren set," and Edinburgh " continues one of the dullest and poorest and on the whole paltriest of places for me. I cannot remember that I have heard one sentence with true meaning in it uttered since I came hither. The very power of thought seems to have forsaken this Athenian City." He complains, perhaps in an aggravated fit of dyspepsia, that his ears " are bewildered by the inane chatter of the people " ; but adds pityingly he does not blame them, since " what sense is in them they no doubt honestly exhibit." That was the judgment of the most penetrating intellect then in Britain, less than twenty years before Stevenson was born.

There remains the peculiar glory of Edinburgh, the splendid and arresting figure of Scott. But when Stevenson was a schoolboy Scott was already a generation dead, a tradition, but no longer an active, living influence in his " own romantic town." Another Scott would have been too great a

boon from nature or fortune ; but even the others I have named had no successors. There were no more Jefferys and Broughams, no more Wilsons and Aytouns, though Blackie was still bustling in his erratic, sporadic way. The pulpit, it is true, resounded to the thunders of old-fashioned eloquence, but its lights were not literary. Often, indeed, they broke into lurid denunciation of works of imagination as subtle devices of the devil for seducing and ensnaring the souls of the unwary. Even now there are good people in Scotland who resolutely refuse to glance inside the covers of a work of fiction. They were more numerous then ; and Edinburgh church circles had a plenteous share of them. From such there could be neither sympathy nor help, neither encouragement nor inspiration for the young devotee of letters with his dreams of achievement in imaginative art. In the seventies Edinburgh, in fact, ran much to sermons, as it still does. It had ceased to " cultivate literature on a little oatmeal " or on anything else. As a centre of literary production its vogue was over. It is striking to note that of Stevenson's early associates, those who were natives of the " metropolis of the North " or bred within its precincts, not one came to literary eminence.

The youthful aspirant therefore lacked the stimulus of an active, eager literary tradition inciting to emulation and rivalry, the stimulus which London so abundantly supplies and Edinburgh supplied in an earlier generation. And Stevenson himself, like those who came after him, had to turn elsewhere for the interest and encouragement without which the finest literary talent droops and dies. To-day his native city is proud, and justly proud, of his fame ; but it must be remarked that

when she had the opportunity she did little enough to foster and aid his genius.

A welcome change and a momentous influence came to him at an opportune moment. In July 1873 he paid a second visit, after an interval of three years, to his cousin, a granddaughter of the Rev. Lewis Balfour who had married the Rev. Churchill Babington, a Cambridge Don and then rector of Cockfield, near Bury St. Edmunds, a quaint old town inimitably described in Carlyle's *Past and Present*. Another guest was Mrs. Sitwell, who later became Mrs. (and Lady) Sidney Colvin. Like Mrs. Fleeming Jenkin five years earlier, she was surprised and charmed by the " young Heine with the Scotch accent." Her future husband, then newly appointed Slade Professor of Fine Art in Cambridge University, was also to visit the rectory, and she wrote telling him of her discovery and urging him to hasten his arrival. He did so and was captivated in turn. To the dual friendship then begun Stevenson was indebted for counsel and help through all his subsequent career. In Mrs. Sitwell he found " an inspirer, consoler, and guide," and in Mr. (now Sir Sidney) Colvin a rarely appreciative critic and practical helper.

For a month he was joyously happy in the cultured kindly society of Cockfield Rectory. With his new friends he made excursions into the surrounding country, and then got his first impressions of " the hopeless gulf there is between England and Scotland and English and Scotch " as described in *The Foreigner at Home*. After a hurried visit to his home he returned South and spent a few days with Mr. Colvin at Norwood, in the south of London ; then he went to Swanston, refreshed, invigorated, vibrating with new hope

and simmering with new ideas. But the old trouble at home was revived, and he was soon writing to Mrs. Sitwell, " Oh, dear God ! this is bad work." He did not, could not tell her everything ; but of his religious troubles, his hopes, aspirations, disappointments, and course of life in general he told her much. Sometimes he permitted himself a sneer at religion, or at any rate at religious exercises as he saw them in his home. Thus, in speaking of his trials in an atmosphere of Calvinism he refers to " my father on his knees and that kind of thing." He acknowledges that he is killing his father and alienating his mother, but it does not occur to him that he may be wrong and they may be right.

He did not alienate his mother ; his worst follies, his most obstinate opposition, could not do that, but there were times when her heart, for all her brave show of lightness, was racked and tortured very near to the breaking-point, because her sense of right forced her to condemn the son who was more to her than life itself. At that time 17 Heriot Row was perhaps the unhappiest home in Edinburgh, though not wholly for the reasons given to Mrs. Sitwell. Louis could exclaim tragically over his miseries, but in the midst of them he could still be light-hearted. " It is impossible to depress me," he reports, a piece of self-criticism which bears the stamp of absolute veracity. Just then he was reading " Werther," and though he despised that once popular hero, he nevertheless liked him because he " wrote the most delightful letters in the world." Some of his own letters are manifestly the result of a sharp attack of Wertherism speedily relieved, however, by a cheerfulness that even Mark Tapley could scarcely have excelled. " Were'na my heart licht I wad dee," he repeated, justifying

the levity which was so often his shield and buckler in time of trouble.

Edinburgh became not less but more distasteful. He returned to it from the Suffolk rectory and London with regret, and within a fortnight of his arrival home he was off again, this time with his father on a flying visit to the Burns country. They saw the poet's house at Dumfries, a sight which filled Louis with melancholy ; they wandered by the ruins of Lincluden Abbey and the Nith, names and haunts for ever dear to the Scottish Muse ; and extended their tour to the little kirkyard of Irongray where lies Helen Walker, the original of Jeanie Deans, nobly commemorated by a tribute in the form of monument and inscription by the author of *Waverley*. Had they pushed a few miles farther up among the moors, they would have reached Craigenputtock, also a shrine consecrated by genius.

The year 1872 saw nothing from the pen of Louis, at any rate nothing that has survived, but in 1873 he opened his real career as an author with the paper on " Roads." It was sent to the *Saturday Review* and rejected. Ultimately, his good angel Mr. Colvin aiding, it appeared in the *Portfolio*, edited by P. G. Hamerton, art critic and biographer of Turner, over the signature L. S. Stoneven.

It has to be noted that, throughout his whole career as a writer, Stevenson was especially fortunate in having friends at every turn to do him service. Where other young authors have had to make their own way, fight their own battles, and succeed or fail without help offered or given, he found volunteers eager and able to aid. In the end, of course, an author must be his own best friend. No man, it has been said, was ever written down except by himself. Assuredly no man ever was

or can be written up except by himself. But in the beginning, well-considered, effective help means more than the outsider may guess, and Stevenson more than any recent writer may be said to have been nursed into authorship. How brilliantly he justified the faith of his friends the world knows.

The little paper on " Roads " gave a fillip to his ambition, and he proceeded to more important work. It was then that he began to sketch the article on Walt Whitman, who, as he says, " tumbled his world upside down." Whitman's " blood-beats of song " became, in fact, the blood-beats of much of Stevenson's philosophy. Here are sentiments which seem to colour and inspire some of the most familiar and characteristic passages in the Essays : " Who troubles himself about his ornaments is lost. This is what you shall do. Love the earth and sun and the animals ; despise riches ; give alms to every one that asks ; stand up for the stupid and crazy ; devote your income and labours to others ; hate tyrants . . . have patience and indulgence towards the people ; take off your hat to nothing known or unknown or to any man or number of men ; go freely with powerful uneducated persons ; re-examine all you have been told at school or church ; dismiss whatever insults your own soul." The germ of much that has been taken as pure Stevenson lies, I think, in that passage.

Autumn, and perhaps secret and domestic trouble, brought a prostrating attack of fever and rheumatism, with threatened pleurisy and other complications. But, as then and always he showed an undaunted spirit. His father's friend, the Lord Advocate of the day, suggested that he should go to the English, not the Scots, Bar. The idea

pleased him and, ill as he was, he insisted on hurrying off to enter his name forthwith at one of the Inns of Court. But on reaching London he collapsed. An eminent physician, Sir Andrew Clark, was called in, and his diagnosis put the English Bar out of the question. He found complete nervous prostration, with alarming symptoms of phthisis. The medical verdict was that the patient must go off at once to the Riviera, or at any rate to a warmer climate than that of England, and that he had better go alone. Accordingly, early in November his parents saw him off to Mentone, whither he travelled by easy stages. At Sens he had the expereince of buying poems from a blind poet out in the streets hawking his own wares. More to his taste was a volume of Essays by Sainte-Beuve, whom Matthew Arnold was then popularising in England. At Avignon and by the Rhone he would fain have lingered, but a nervous, feverish restlessness drove him on. Mentone was a paradise of brightness and sunshine; but he was too ill physically and perhaps mentally to enjoy the soft Southern landscape, and pined for the Braids and the Pentlands. His condition was indeed pitiable. He was weary with the weariness of one who has lost all zest and relish of life. "I am a man of seventy," he wrote to Mrs. Sitwell. "Oh! Medea, kill me or make me young again"—a tragic cry from three-and-twenty. "I have not made a joke upon my living soul since I left London," he told Charles Baxter. Stevenson unable to joke must have been a pathetic figure.

To gain what Poe calls "surcease of sorrow" he tried opium, and found the happiness and the pleasure terrifying. At intervals of depression—and he had more of them than the public imagines—

he resorted to opium to the very end ; but luckily he was not enslaved by it, as were Coleridge and De Quincey and later Wilkie Collins. Something better than opium was at hand—the companionship of a friend who never failed to act as a tonic. Towards the end of December Mr. Colvin joined him at Monaco, where they spent a few days together, and a few more in a quiet hotel at Monte Carlo. As all the world knows, the Casino at Monte Carlo is the centre of life and excitement to that gay community. Stevenson, ever eager for new experiences, new sensations, wished to " take a hand in the game," but appeared in such an extraordinary dress that he was refused admittance. Thereupon in revenge he proposed to write a series of papers upon gambling-hells and their evils, a proposal which fortunately came to nothing. From Monte Carlo the two friends moved on to Mentone. There, at the old Hotel Mirabeau, now no more, Mr. Colvin, having business in Paris, left him, but returned after a brief absence.

In the meantime Louis had recovered his spirits, the " Oh ! Medea " mood having passed like a summer cloud. The reason for this rebound, at any rate in part, was the presence of two Russian ladies of position and culture—Madame Zassetzka and her sister, Madame Garschine, both his seniors in age by some fifteen or twenty years. Sir Sidney Colvin, who met them then, describes them in his charming volume *Memories and Notes* as " brilliantly accomplished and cultivated women." Madame Zassetzka, a dashing, daring woman of the world, had written comedies and tried life in many ways that were not comic. She was the type of woman that Tolstoi has drawn with so masterly a hand, and like his Anna was just then indulging herself

with a lover or love-affair somewhere in Poland. Presumably, therefore, she had no eyes for the young Scot. But Madame Garschine, who was gentle, invalidish, romantic, and unattached, immediately began to evince a tender interest in him. She may have thought that the poor lonely boy needed a mother; she may have pitied his "bashfulness and blushfulness," for he seems to have had a most uncharacteristic fit of timidity; but the impressible Stevenson promptly took her sentiments as something more than maternal. Indeed, he could scarcely have been mistaken.

Russians of that period (as of this) practised a freedom of speech and behaviour which had nothing of the reserve of the "douce" folk of Edinburgh. Madame Garschine made no secret of her feelings, and Louis trembled like a girl on the verge of a proposal wondering how to take it. To his confidante Mrs. Sitwell he confessed that he was "damnably embarrassed"; but the greater the embarrassment the greater the interest. He did not repulse Madame Garschine; he only hoped she would not make a fool of herself or of him. The daily incidents and variations in the little affair were noted and reported with a minuteness worthy of a Jane Austen heroine. Indeed, his intimate letters at that time read like barometrical records of his feelings, which rose and fell with every movement, almost with every look and gesture, of Madame Garschine. In his published letters the child Nelitchka occupies much space, but in reality he found her a nuisance, as she doubtless was in such a situation. A poet without love, it has been said, were a physical and metaphysical impossibility. Certainly many famous poets have shown a marvellous faculty for falling in love. Louis was

at once too much the gallant and too much the poet not to follow the glorious examples, nor did he fail to express the rapture of the dominant passion. The *New Poems*, so happily saved by Mr. Hellman, include a poem addressed to the two sisters in "guid braid Scots," and a more intimate little piece meant for Madame Garschine alone in which feeling reference is made to "constancy and love."

Such things are not to be taken too seriously. The little flutter of sentiment was but a sort of wayside episode that passed and faded quickly into the background of memory. But it is interesting for the light it sheds on the mind and temperament of Robert Louis Stevenson, and in particular on the characteristic little vanities which lay so near the surface and were so easily stirred and inflamed. We may readily believe that Madame Garschine had more than a mere maternal fondness for the engaging youth who could talk to her with such fluency and sprightliness on all manner of subjects, and modulate his tone so well in the intimacies of private conversation. Moreover, there was the attraction of youth. It is not an uncommon thing for forty to fall in love with twenty, and in such cases the older love is apt to burn with much more intensity than the younger. Stevenson was invited to visit the ladies at their home in Poland, but the visit was never paid and Madame Garschine dropped out of his story. What became of her afterwards is unknown.

But gallantry did not occupy all his time even then. He read George Sand, Balzac, and other French authors, and he wrote as ardently and indefatigably as ever. Writing, as Henley truly observed, was the very breath of life to him. Death alone could quench that steadfast passion. In a

fit of dissatisfaction he had laid aside the paper on Walt Whitman ; now he took it up again with renewed ardour. At that time, too, he wrote " Ordered South," the most pathetic and touching of his Essays, which he describes as " scrupulously correct." It appeared, again through the good offices of Mr. Colvin, in *Macmillan's Magazine* for May 1874. As we proceed it becomes increasingly clear that but for the constant aid of his father and friends Stevenson would never have reached the stage of making an income from literature. The magazine success gave a fillip to his ambition ; but his spirits were again drooping. His chief solace were the letters to Mrs. Sitwell, to whom on many points he opened his heart. In response she gave him sympathy, encouragement, wise counsel, and above all intelligent, womanly understanding which proved most excellent medicine.

Despite chagrin and disappointment, his father was liberal with money, and being, as he thought, about to die, he became morbidly anxious regarding the repayment of what he considered a loan. Under a slight disguise he tells in *Lay Morals* how the situation affected him. While oppressed by the thought that he was dying, he used the money in his possession like a miser, denying himself all but bare necessities. When recovery seemed assured, however, he allowed himself to spend more freely, trusting " to the future to lend a help to mankind," as he had been helped by the hand of his father, a fantastic idea due, perhaps, to an enfeebled state of mind.

During that visit to the Riviera he met Andrew Lang, to whom he was introduced by Mr. Colvin. On both sides first impressions were doubtful. Lang described Louis as girlish and hectic, with

long hair. " Clad in a long blue cloak, he looked nothing less than English except Scotch." On his part Louis found Lang good-looking, but smacking offensively of Oxford pedantry and snobbery abroad to sneer at a world devoid of culture. The contrast was at once striking and amusing. In both men there was a superficial element of flippancy ; but the flippancy of the Oxford common-room was not as the flippancy of Bohemian Edinburgh. Lang, airy, cynical, polished, thin, and inclined to be screechy of voice, was disposed to mock, and in Lang's mockery there was something bitingly acidulous ; Stevenson, also airy and cynical, but *outre*, outlandish, felt and resented the airs of superiority. The meeting, in fact, was in the nature of a collision. Nevertheless the two became fast friends, and soon after Stevenson complained of the effects of some " blarsted champagne " drunk in some little jollification with " Pretty-Well Lang."

Later " Andrew of the brindled hair " of Stevenson's verse was conspicuous in the band of literary men in London who, as it seemed to others, were engaged in a gentle conspiracy to " write up " the author of *Treasure Island*. From personal knowledge of their efforts towards the close of Stevenson's career I can testify to their zeal and assiduity. There have been many organised " booms " in literature, but few authors of any time ever had more loyal or zealous friends than R. L. S.

The blue cloak mentioned by Lang was a Paris purchase by Mr. Colvin, necessitated because his protégé lacked a proper overcoat. It pleased the wearer mightily, because it gave him a picturesque " piratical look " which made the people of Mentone and Monte Carlo turn and stare, as the Edinburgh people had stared at earlier

eccentricities in dress. By choice rather than necessity Stevenson was then financially on very short commons. He was shabby and down-at-heel, partly from lack of cash, partly from an incurable liking for a vagabond appearance, deliberately cultivated for its striking effects.

But though hampered and at times distressed by poverty, he was not depressed, neither was his literary work interrupted. In the summer of 1874 he wrote his little criticism of Lytton's *Fables of Song* for the *Fortnightly Review*, then edited by John Morley, the "honest John" of politics, the Lord Morley of later fame. Yet more important, his article on "Victor Hugo's Romances" appeared in the August number of the *Cornhill*, under the editorship of Leslie Stephen, another friend who rendered him signal service. His severe apprenticeship was at last beginning to bear fruit; he was steadily mastering "the means or instrument of the literary art," and he was filled with the elation of success. While, however, discerning editors were beginning to appreciate his work, those early essays made no appeal whatever to the general reader.

The assumption, so often made, that with Stevenson's first contributions to magazines the public instantly recognised a new star in the firmament of letters is entirely erroneous. When he became popular as a story-teller, readers went back to his Essays and found them charming; but on their first appearance they attracted no attention. Several years were to pass before their author was "discovered"; and, indeed, it may be said that Stevenson's approach to popularity even with his stories was extraordinarily slow and difficult. And when at last popular recognition came, it came not

from London or Edinburgh, but from the young eager world beyond the Atlantic. To America belongs the credit of " discovering " Stevenson, as to America in an earlier generation belonged the credit of discovering Carlyle ; and to the end Stevenson's readers in the States far outnumbered his readers in Britain.

But in 1874 he was getting his foot definitely planted on the literary ladder and was elated. Moreover, there were other circumstances to hearten him. His father, his generous, much-enduring father, increased his allowance to £7 per month—£84 a year, or, as Louis whimsically put it, " for dignity's sake two thousand one hundred francs." In good heart and much-improved health he left Mentone in April and joined his cousin R. A. M. Stevenson in Paris. There he was introduced to the Latin Quarter and French Bohemian life, as lived in the circle and haunts of artists. By May he was back at Swanston ; but a month later he was again with Mr. Colvin at Hampstead, London. During that visit he was elected a member of the Savile Club, his sponsors being Mr. Colvin and Andrew Lang ; and there for some years he became a tolerably-familiar figure. In the club and at the house of Leslie Stephen he met some literary and journalistic notabilities, among them Miss Thackeray (Lady Richmond Ritchie), Dr. Appleton, of the *Academy*, then a flourishing journal, now defunct, and Walter Herries Pollock, editor of the *Saturday Review*, who, presumably, had declined his paper on " Roads." There is no sign that any of them estimated his work highly or that such of them as were editors showed any eagerness to enroll him as a contributor.

He was eager to meet Carlyle; and Leslie Stephen, who knew the sage, undertook to be intermediary, mentioning as a sort of peace-offering that the young hero-worshipper was busy on a study of John Knox. Carlyle responded with a growl that he was sick of visitors, and desired to hear nothing more about Knox, though if his would-be visitor ever became articulate on the subject he might repeat his application. The application does not appear to have been repeated. One regrets to-day that the meeting did not take place. It would be interesting and illuminative to have Carlyle's candid opinion of Stevenson, and perhaps Stevenson's of Carlyle. There might be a pungent paragraph in *The Reminiscences* or a picturesque page in *Memories and Portraits*, and either or both would to-day be read eagerly. Carlyle was in truth much afflicted by the curious and voluble. Then, or a little earlier, a visitor with better claims than Stevenson's called ostensibly to worship, and stayed to instruct in the omniscient Oxford manner. Carlyle endured in grim impatience; but at parting he delivered his shot. "Good-bye," he said in good Annandale Scots; "I tolerated ye because I kenned yer mither. But I hope never to set eyes on ye again." On the whole, perhaps, the sprightly Stevenson had a lucky escape.

In July he returned to Edinburgh, but almost immediately he was off once more, this time on a cruise round the west coast of Scotland in a small sixteen-ton schooner, the *Heron*. His companions were Sir Walter Simpson and Mr. T. Barclay. At the end of a fortnight of wholesome roughing he appeared at Swanston, bronzed, vigorous, unkempt as a tramp and ebulliently cheerful. He had lost

his portmanteau containing what was written of his article on Whitman, with many notes ; but the loss was nothing in his gain of vitality. " My health is a miracle," he reported ; and indeed, despite his consumptive delicacy, his colds, fevers, and hæmorrhages, his resilience then and always was amazing. He found his parents preparing for a tour by Chester to Barmouth and Llandudno, and he joined their expedition, extending his holiday by a walk into Buckinghamshire. The result of the walk was the paper on " An Autumn Effect " which appeared in the *Portfolio* for April and May 1875.

To most writers such incessant runnings to and fro would be a fatal interruption of work ; to Stevenson they were a stimulus. In trains, on steamers, in odd corners of hotels and boarding-houses, he wrote, wrote, wrote as with a nervous dread of missing a single opportunity. This excessive activity is partly explained by his eagerness, his sheer delight in his craft ; but fundamentally it was due to a febrile constitution, an inability to rest and be quiet, in fact to want of inertia which, as Carlyle remarks, is so common and withal so needful. Great minds, great imaginations, enjoy periods of repose, of fallowness to replenish the exhausted cells. From first to last Stevenson was always at high pitch, always, as it were, at full stretch in the chase. In the end he paid the penalty ; and there can be no doubt that his work suffered, but his " dire industry " was such as may shame many a strong practitioner.

In the flush of new-found strength he once more took up his paper on Walt Whitman (first and last it cost him much trouble), but concentrated more especially on a study then lying very near his heart

—" John Knox and His Relations to Women," privately dubbed " Knox and His Females." That relation he appears to have viewed almost with envy. " John Knox had a better time of it with his godly females than I have," he told Mrs. Sitwell, in deploring his own lack of agreeable society. The picture of the fierce, relentless moralist, author of *The Monstrous Regiment of Women*, comforting himself, like David, in old age with a young wife, may have tickled his sense of humour ; certainly Knox fascinated him. In his enthusiasm he planned a full-dress biography of the Scottish Reformer. Had he carried out his intention, the result, we may be sure, would be an improvement in liveliness on the " Life " by the Rev. Thomas McCrie which we possess, and would probably be a valuable delineation of character. His essay, as finally written, appeared a year later in *Macmillan's Magazine*, after being tried experimentally on the members of the Speculative Society, and was included in the volume *Familiar Studies of Men and Books*.

## A Vital Influence

Throughout the vital years 1871–5 he was in intimate touch with his old teacher and friend Fleeming Jenkin, and gradually surrendered to the force and charm of that puissant and versatile personality. As has already been noted, their first real contact was in the nature of a conflict. Stevenson, in his airy way, began with flippancy and effrontery, and Jenkin was trenchant in rebuke. Of such a beginning a lasting antagonism might naturally be predicted. It is a tribute to the native worth of both men that precisely the reverse was the fact, and that

long before the end they were linked in mutual respect and esteem. The Jenkins, as we have seen, made a social feature of dramatic entertainments given at their house, first in Fettes Row and then at 3 Great Stuart Street. Mrs. Jenkin, a woman of charm and accomplishment, was a talented actress, and her husband an enthusiastic, indefatigable stage-manager. They gathered round them a band of ardent amateurs, Stevenson among the number, though in the stage sense he was no actor. The private theatricals were excellent fun ; sometimes they attained the dignity of serious performances. To Stevenson, promoted from being a mere prompter, or " super," they afford the chance to figure in fancy dress and indulge an inherent taste for display and make-believe. But their value to him and their interest to-day lie wholly in the fact that they brought him into a real intimacy with Jenkin. One characteristic incident arising out of those dramatic activities is described by Stevenson in the " Memoir " of his friend. Salvini had played " Macbeth " in Edinburgh, and Stevenson, with all the cocksureness of the amateur, sent a notice of the performance to the *Academy*—and on its appearance took the paper to his own stage-manager. Jenkin read part of the criticism and flung the paper contemptuously on the floor. " That won't do," he told the astonished critic. " You were thinking of yourself, not of Salvini." Stevenson protests that the judgment was unfair, that he was not thinking of himself, but merely bungling a trade he had not mastered. The probability, however, is that Jenkin, having detected the egoism which was a radical defect of Stevenson's character, seized the opportunity to give a salutary lesson.

He hated shams, and his glib, sparkling young friend was flamboyantly advertising the faults of a pretender. His own sincerity was absolute, and his courage was at least equal to his sincerity. Perhaps in all Edinburgh there was not another so well qualified to save "the atheistical youth," who came to him full of levity and scorn for sacred things in religion and in life. His plan was to meet scepticism with scepticism, edged with sarcasm, after the manner of Job. If one side was wrong, what proof was there that the other was right? Had the Almighty confided the secrets of the universe to the mockers Voltaire and Heine, or the agnostics Huxley and Tyndall? It might be they were the people and that wisdom would die with them. Well, well! granting as much, meanwhile here was life, many-coloured and tumultuous, a battle-field in which men must fight whatever their beliefs and whether they understood or not what they were fighting for. What was Stevenson himself fighting for? A little food, a little raiment, something to fill the empty belly and cover the bare back? Was that all? Just a craven fear of cold and hunger? To say that was to say that men were idiots, that God had blundered, and that the universe which Mr. Tyndall and his friends understood so well was without meaning.

Once, when Stevenson consulted him on a point of conduct, his answer was, "How do you suppose Christ would advise you?" Stevenson admitted He would not counsel anything unkind or cowardly.

"No," said Jenkin decisively, "nor anything amusing." The thrust told because behind it there was not only the strength of a fierce sincerity, but an exquisite understanding founded on sympathy, which was cruel only to be kind.

Stevenson's own testimony is unequivocal. "Far on in middle life," he says in the *Memoir* already mentioned, "when men begin to lie down with the bestial goddesses Comfort and Respectability, the strings of his nature still sounded as high a note as a young man's. He loved the harsh voice of duty like a call to battle. He loved courage, enterprise, brave natures, a brave word, an ugly virtue; everything that lifts us above the table where we eat or the bed we sleep upon."

He admired and praised David, and men like David, not because they were perfect or saintly, but because they bore themselves valiantly in the battle of life, because they were inspired by great ideals, and in spite of lapses and failures enriched humanity with noble examples of heroism. He hated pettiness, prudery, meanness, deceit, insincerity, and set in his own conduct a standard of transparent, almost quixotic, honesty and fidelity. The benefit to Stevenson of such a friend and counsellor at that juncture can scarcely be overestimated, and, indeed, the friendship may well have saved him to literature. Jenkin in effect took the vapouring "atheistical youth" and, so to speak, shook at least the worst of his absurdities out of him. Nor did the service end with the correction of false doctrine or the eradication of ludicrous conceits; it penetrated downward to the underlying principles of conduct. It would be an exaggeration to say that Jenkin taught Stevenson honour, but it is no exaggeration to say he taught him reverence and many things besides. I emphasise that point. For I believe that, of the manifold influences which moulded and inspired Robert Louis Stevenson, that of Fleeming Jenkin was one of the most profound, as it certainly was

one of the most beneficent. From others he learned the art that was to delight a world ; from Jenkin he learned the beauty of sincerity and simplicity, the folly of theatrical displays of presumption, the vulgarity of cant, the inexorable need of obedience to Higher Powers, and not least—

> What man may learn, what man may do
> Of right or wrong, of false or true.

It was a great lesson and it was not lost on the pupil. When we admire, as admire we must, the brave, blithe spirit of Stevenson, when we are refreshed and exhilarated by his joyous philosophy, fortified by his fortitude, animated by his courage, we should not forget his debt to his old master, the Professor of Engineering. The spirit that Jenkin infused lives and breathes in many a passage of Stevenson that has charmed and braced millions of readers. And to his deep and vital influence were added the sympathy, the understanding of Mrs. Jenkin, and the rare domestic charm that made 3 Great Stuart Street an oasis in a desert of dreariness, a haven of refuge from a censorious or persecuting world. When other doors were shut against him that door was always open, and within was the welcome and the appreciation which, as he remarked himself at the time, bring out what is best in a man.

Whether Jenkin knew much or little or nothing at all of the clandestine joys of St. James's Square, Leith Street, and other dear resorts does not appear. That quidnuncs and gossips must have " whispered and muttered and murmured " darkly in his ear seems inevitable, and doubtless he was

perfectly well aware of the outraged feelings of the obstreperous Mrs. Grundy. Yet there is no sign that he ever made private knowledge a text or pretext for preaching, a forbearance which at least proves him an astute psychologist.

## Remorse and Depression

Stevenson, however, was far too much Stevenson to turn at once or wholly from his own ways. He might sit with immense satisfaction at the feet of Gamaliel, might admire, even adore, but it did not follow that he was bound by Gamaliel's theories of life and its pleasures. As the Jenkin influence developed, or at any rate in the period of its duration, he had more frequent lapses into seriousness, displayed a growing tendency to self-analysis and self-criticism. That tendency, however, is not to be attributed entirely, nor perhaps even largely, to Jenkin. Other influences, other teachers, were at work. Long ago Ovid wrote of knowing the right and pursuing the wrong, and Stevenson knew right from wrong at least as well as Ovid. That he so often "stepped aside," took, so to speak, the left-hand turning well aware he should take the right, brought, in moments of reflection and introspection, a feeling of regret at times deepening to remorse. For Stevenson was not all lightness, nor always the defiant, callous, sneering sceptic.

To picture him with a perpetual grin of levity were to misjudge him and deceive ourselves. He had his moods of revolt, of frivolity, as a good-natured man has fits of anger or envy. But the groundwork of his character was seriousness, however ostentatiously the Voltaire–Heine spirit

might at times play on the surface. He had, moreover, what the poet, the creative artist, always has and must have—an infinite capacity for deep and poignant emotion; and when that emotion, quickened by a Covenanting conscience, turned inward on himself, he suffered exquisitely. Signs of the inherent sadness which underlay his gaiety appear at an early date. In his intimate self-communings he was not gay nor frivolous. "I know," he sang, in an unpublished poem written in a college notebook—

> I know, O heart of mine. O weary heart
> That in the fatal tenor of thy days
> Much thou hast learned in many evil ways.

The confession is like a confession of St. Augustine, and is no less sincere than the saint's remorseful outpourings over early follies.

Another early piece, suggestively entitled "All Influences were in vain," is yet more deeply touched with regret. "All day," says the lonely wanderer by the sea—

> All day the sea was on one hand,
> The long beach shone with sun and wet—
> We walked in trio on the sand,
> My shadow, I and my regret.

Yet it was the same Stevenson who with equal sincerity and about the same time sang:

> Who talks to me of reason now?
> It would be more delight
> To have died in Cleopatra's arms
> Than be alive to-night.

"Mark Antony," said Henley, in a flash of insight. With a Cleopatra to lure and charm, the Scots

Presbyterian was no less susceptible, no less ready to become passion's slave, than was the noble Roman who never heard of John Calvin or John Knox. The duality of man's nature, so fruitful a theme with moralists, so forcibly and dramatically illustrated by Stevenson the novelist, was in Stevenson the man abnormally complex and confused. No man's life is all of a piece. There is no such thing as a straight path from the cradle to the grave. The progress is often sideways, with many slippings and turnings, now up, now down, now through thorny jungles, now among "snares and gins and pitfalls," and Stevenson's course was more devious, more broken and twisted and tangled than most. No doubt the cause lay chiefly in himself.

> The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,
> But in ourselves.

Had Stevenson in those years taken "Inconsistency and Volatility" for his motto, the choice might appear well made. Variableness, erratic change of sentiment and behaviour, contradictions so sharp and bewildering they stagger belief, such just then might seem to be his rule of life. One night he was ardently extolling the ideal and the beautiful at 3 Great Stuart Street; the next with equal ardour, in a tavern in Advocate's Close, he was drinking with glorious profanity to a draggled goddess of Freedom, and spouting rank red republicanism of the kind affected by Swinburne in his hot, Hugo-inspired youth.

In that tavern in Advocate's Close a mysterious society known as the L.J.R. held its meetings and promulgated doctrines apparently imbibed direct

from Rousseau. The membership was limited to six, and Stevenson appears to have been the directing animating spirit. The mystic brotherhood was devoted to Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, a creed joyously interpreted by the members as the right to think, speak, and act according to their sovereign pleasure. Some syllabus or document grandiloquently setting forth its aims fell into the hands of Thomas Stevenson, producing yet another domestic earthquake. For politically its tenets were as nauseous to the redoubtable Tory, as religiously were the atheistical doctrines of John Tyndall and his kind to the unbending Covenanter. The society came to a sudden end and, I believe, Thomas Stevenson played a wrathful and decisive part in its inglorious extinction.

Simultaneously, as though to give the essential spice to life, there were various love-affairs, little romances, incidental and by the way, for the lover was ever in evidence, crest up. One such passing romance was taking a serious turn when it was peremptorily extinguished by the lady's father. In such matters fathers are so apt to forget they were once young themselves, and ready, perhaps, to throw prudence to the winds and count the world well lost for love. Experience teaches wisdom even in the indulgence of absorbing and romantic sentiment. The song " I Dreamed of Forest Alleys Fair " celebrates the sweet hours spent with " Jenny," a little sadly and in retrospect, the bliss being over. With some " charming fair," too, the impressible Louis skated on Duddingston Loch, body to body, her hand " held fast " in his, so that he was able to exclaim rapturously—

> I swear had we been drowned that day,
> We had been drowned in love.

An enviable death, it may be supposed, to a poet in the ecstasies of passion. For winter recreation there were also the " Spec " and the Jenkin theatricals, both in their different ways absorbing.

In summer, after business hours in the office of Skene, Edwards, and Bilton, there were long walks to Swanston by " Buckstone, Fairmilehead, and Braid " ; and out to Glencorse and Cauldstane Slap, the latter a name now for ever associated with " the Four Black Brothers " in *Weir of Hermiston*. Those walks and scenes lived in his memory, perhaps more fondly and fragrantly, and certainly more fruitfully, than did the fleeting wayside romances. Long afterwards the exile revisited in his dreams those beloved haunts of his boyhood and youth, and dreaming he gazed again—

> From Halkerside, from topmost Allermuir
> Or steep Caerketton.

In the last months in Samoa there was scarcely a day, and absolutely no night, in which his thoughts did not wander back to those once familiar scenes. " Oh, that I were the lad I once was ! " he wrote to the late S. R. Crockett. He could never, he said, take the old walk by the Fisher's Tryst and Glencorse, never again set foot on the heather or behold Auld Reekie shimmering in the sun through its haze of smoke. " Do you know," he asked in one of the most touching passages he ever wrote— " do you know where the road crosses the burn under Glencorse Church ? Go there and say a prayer for me. See, it is a sunny day. I would like it to be Sunday . . . And stand on the right bank just where the road goes down into the water, and shut your eyes :—and if I don't appear to you ! " Doubtless he did appear to the mind's eye, and his

spirit still haunts the Pentlands. He travelled far to new and strange lands—yet—

> We shall find him when we seek him.
> In an older home—
> By the hills and streams of childhood
> 'Tis his weird to roam.

These occupations and distractions might seem sufficient to engage his whole energies. Yet in the midst of them all his literary industry continued unabated. "From the smoothness and spontaneity of Stevenson's style," says a discriminating American editor, Mr. H. H. Harper, "one may be led to suppose that his works fell from his pen with unlaboured ease." Nothing could be farther from the truth. As Mr. Harper shows in the fragments he has edited with so much success and profit to all students of Stevenson, the "unlaboured ease" was the result of sleepless ardour and incessant practice. If, indeed, genius be an infinite capacity for taking pains, then Stevenson, even in his irregular youth, must have been the first genius in the land. He wrote, rewrote, destroyed, wrote again, and yet again revised and altered with a patience and perseverance that put most other writers to shame. And let it always be remembered that he strove thus in the face of constant discouragement and opposition.

Of those juvenile productions, many are lost irrecoverably in the files of local newspapers or were destroyed by their author. Some good judges, among them Principal Tulloch of St. Andrews, were much struck by their freshness and beauty; and the early work recovered and made accessible by the Bibliophile Society of Boston justifies the judgment. In verse especially, even from the very

first, there is something more than promise ; there is real performance, as in the boyish piece " The Mill-house ; a Sick-bed Fancy," written when its author was sixteen, and " The Well-Head," written three years later. The former seems to show the youthful poet revelling in the spirit of Keats, a favourite to the end. Here is a little picture deftly drawn that sticks in the mind and shows a clearly-awakened faculty of observation :

> There was no noise at all about the mill,
> And the slope-garden like a dream was still,
> There came no sound at all into the glade,
> Save when the white sack-laden waggons made
> Wheel creaking in the shadowy slanting road
> And the great horses strained against the load.

With less zest, yet with a sort of intermittent regularity, the law studies progressed. Professors were still to the cynical, derisive student a " huge joke " ; and he practised his lampooning talents on them with point and cleverness. Thus, in a college notebook designed for grave principles of law he drew caricatures of one who, like Gadgrind fed on facts and was " big with statistics." The accompanying inscription ends neatly :

> Do you know this whiskered absurdity
> With pince-nez and clerical tie ?
> Poor fellow, he's blind of a sympathy !
> I'd rather be blind of an eye.

The studies, however, were so far successful that at last, in his twenty-fifth year, Stevenson passed his final examination and was " called " to the Scottish Bar.[1] Just before the final ordeal, as he

[1] In Stevenson's time the Faculty Examinations were a very simple matter and in Law presented little difficulty. Nowadays the Examination is much more thorough, while the range is much extended. The " Public Examination " at which the intrant is actually admitted to the Faculty has long been of a purely formal character. An Arts degree of any British University exempts a Candidate from examination in General Scholarship ; but Stevenson had no degree.

waited with other candidates in all the discomfort of evening-dress, someone told him he looked "like a drunken Irishman returning from a funeral," which brought the prompt response, "I wish I was that Irishman returning from that funeral."

He was called, but can scarcely be said to have been chosen. In his account of Edinburgh he himself gives an amusing description of "the *salle des pas perdus* of the Scottish Bar," where idle youths by a "ferocious custom" parade, breathing "dust and bombazine" as they exhibit themselves in vain to potential patrons with briefs to bestow. As advocate Robert Louis Stevenson put up a professional brass plate on the door of 17 Heriot Row, engaged the "partial services" of a clerk, and made some perfunctory appearances in the Parliament House, the Law Courts of Edinburgh. But clients were shy. Either three or four briefs were all that reached the young advocate, and they came from personal friends. His total earnings at the Bar scarcely exceeded a five-pound note.

## CHAPTER VII

### W. E. HENLEY

THE early winter of 1875 marks the beginning of a momentous epoch in Stevenson's life and development. On an evening in the middle of February, Leslie Stephen, editor of the *Cornhill Magazine*, lectured at the Philosophical Institution, Edinburgh. The following day he called on his young contributor and took him to see another *Cornhill* contributor, then lying in the Edinburgh infirmary. That second contributor was W. E. Henley, with whom Stevenson was to become more closely, more intimately associated than with any other friend early or late. After his death his wife remarked that Louis had few really intimate friends, and she was right. For all his exuberant egotism, his persistent, irrepressible itch to talk of himself, he had the Scottish reserve which is chary of confidences, especially in regard to matters of conduct or deep feeling. From this new comrade of many years he had few secrets, and none relating to the various phases of "Bohemianism" which then or later were part of his life.

The career of Henley is a story of hardship and courage scarcely, if at all, inferior to Stevenson's own. After many disappointments in the south he went to Edinburgh as a sort of forlorn hope to put himself under the care of Lister, then in the

zenith of his reputation for antiseptic discoveries. He went as a poor man without influence or introduction. On the appointed day he appeared at the hospital, hobbling on crutches at the tail end of a procession of patients, all of the poorer classes. The meeting with the great surgeon was characteristic, at least of Henley.

"Why do you come to me?" Lister asked, after hearing the history of the case.

"Because," was the reply, "others have failed. I was told *you* were no good, so I thought you might be able to do something for me." Lister smiled, one may suppose a trifle grimly.

"Rather an odd reason," he remarked dryly; "but we shall see what can be done."

In the event much was done; and surgeon and poet admired each other, as original men generally do when they come to know each other well.

At the time of that first meeting with Stevenson, Henley had been eighteen months under treatment for the tubercular disease of the foot from which he suffered. There was progress, but it was slow and unspeakably tedious, and he hailed the advent of the sprightly Louis as a godsend. On his part Stevenson was instantly attracted, and to be attracted was to be enthusiastic. Here was a crippled genius, bludgeoned, beaten down by circumstance, yet valiantly resolved to be the "master of his fate, the captain of his soul." Stevenson's heart went out to him in pity, in sympathy, and very much in admiration. There was yet another attraction. Duller eyes than Stevenson's would have discerned in this new acquaintance a Bohemian of rare gifts, untouched, unhampered by any local prejudice or creed, one who brought a keen breath of the brave, free outer

world even into the drugged atmosphere of a hospital.

The scene was as depressing as scene could well be. The visitors found the patient in a dreary little room, with two beds and a couple of sick children in the second bed. The poet's feelings are expressed with heart-gripping poignancy in *Hospital Verses*, in which poetry and realism are blended as genius alone can blend them. While the visitors were there a girl came in to visit the sick children and played dominoes with them on the counterpane—a scene for Hogarth or Wilkie. "Stephen and I," Louis reported to Mrs. Sitwell, "sat on a couple of chairs, and the poor fellow sat up in his bed with his hair and beard all tangled and talked as cheerfully as if he were in a king's palace or the Great King's palace of the blue air." Those who knew him will remember that Henley's hair and beard always were tangled, and that it was a jest whether or not he ever condescended to use brush and comb. "I shall try to be useful to him," Stevenson wrote with a too-anxious regard for his "shalls" and "wills"; and he was as good as his word. Henley pined for books, and Stevenson brought them in piles—"big yellow books, quite impudently French," as related in one of the hospital poems. Nor were books all. Friends too were brought to cheer the invalid, in particular Charles Baxter, who was thus inducted into the enchanted circle of three.

When spring came Louis provided a carriage and took his protégé—often half carrying him up and down stairs—for drives round Edinburgh, to Cramond, to the Forth Bridge, to Portobello, and even seaward to North Berwick, or, better still, through Morningside by Craiglockhart and the

Braids to the Pentlands and Swanston Cottage at the green foot of Caer Ketton. In spring and summer the scenery in those southern environs of Edinburgh is delightful, hilly and healthy enough to suggest the Highlands, and yet set in the midst of a wide expanse of fertile land, dotted with prosperous farmsteads suggesting corn and fat cattle. After one of those country outings Stevenson reported of Henley that "the look in his face was wine to me." Nor did his services stop with books and carriage-drives. One day an acquaintance met him hurrying from 17 Heriot Row with an inverted chair on his head, like a huge enveloping four-spiked helmet.

"What on earth are you doing now?" he was asked in amazement.

"Taking this chair to the hospital for a friend," replied Stevenson, and hurried on.

Most memorable, most exhilarating of all, however, were the long, eager talks with his new friend. For the first time in his native city Stevenson found a kindred spirit, one who shared his ideals in literature and treated the Ten Commandments with a freedom that was enchanting. Henley's attitude to life was not squeamish or puritanic, nor had he in him the least taint of the Pharisee. For the smug, self-sufficient, narrow, arrogant, often brutal orthodoxies of certain sections of Edinburgh society his contempt was at least as fierce as Stevenson's, and more, far more than Stevenson, he had the gift of biting, blistering expression. His masterly essay and pungent notes in the Centenary Edition of Burns show how thoroughly he grasped the Scottish character, and how absolutely fearless he was in criticism. His closest friend would never have ventured the opinion that humility was at any

stage or in any way one of his besetting virtues, or hypocrisy one of his besetting sins.

The two discussed most things in heaven and earth ; above all, they discussed literature in all its aspects, and literary projects in all their romantic glamour. One important fact deserves particular attention. Henley was already master of a style, both in prose and verse, far surer, far more supple and incisive, than Stevenson's. Henley immediately recognised in his new friend a remarkable and engaging talent and was zealous in encouragement. But he also detected in him a vein of fantasy, a streak of falsity, of unreality incompatible with high and enduring achievement in art ; and he criticised bluntly. Stevenson in return disputed hotly and ingeniously ; but he profited. As regards sanity, grasp, and precision of style, the curious may discern a great leap forward, dating from the beginning of the Henley association. " My dear fellow," Henley would insist, " clarify, strain. Get out of moonlit clouds, get away from imitations. Reality's the thing. Keep your eye on the object. You want beauty. Very well. Truth is beauty. Your preceptor Keats should have taught you that. And incidentally observe the practice of Shakespeare and Burns—both considerable artists, eh ? " *Per contra*, Stevenson found some of Henley's poetry " slack and unequal " ; but he was generously ready to praise, ready too to take a hint or a lesson from this amazing " elder brother in the Muses."

From 1875 onward Stevenson, I think, wrote more and more with his eye on the object, surely the golden rule in all true writing. He was still a long way from the reality of the great masters ; still a long way from the reality of *Weir of Hermiston ;* but in some of the best scenes and passages in the

intermediate works—*Kidnapped*, *The Master of Ballantrae*, *Underwoods*, and the rest—the influence of Henley's robust, uncompromising common sense may easily be traced. In view of later happenings and their consequences with which I shall have to deal, that circumstance should be noted and borne in mind.

Yet another service rendered by Louis a little later was to introduce Henley to Fleeming Jenkin, and through him to a small but interesting coterie of enthusiasts in art and music. The Jenkin association lasted pleasantly for two years, with hot disputes and verbal quarrels which with most men would have meant separation; but with Henley and Jenkin merely cemented the friendship more firmly.

Under the fresh stimulus of argument and discussion Stevenson's literary activity increased, if increase were possible. Two sketches, *Movements of Young Children* and *On the Enjoyment of Unpleasant Places*—a suggestive subject—were printed in the *Portfolio* for August and November of that year, 1875, and earlier in the same year, almost on the very day of his meeting with Henley, indeed, appeared his pamphlet *An Appeal to the Clergy of the Church of Scotland*, bearing the imprint of W. Blackwood & Son. These slight contributions by no means represented the total of his "output," for at that time he was producing much which his better judgment condemned to the flames.

The *Appeal* is a plea for religious tolerance and unity, the unity, in fact, which has since become a question of urgent policy with the Scottish Churches; but at the time of its appearance the tiny brochure of eleven pages received no attention whatever. To-day it is well worth reading

for its catholicity, its good sense, and its prescient insight. The year 1875 also saw the production of his paper on Béranger for the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, as firstfruits of his studies in French literature. The curious in such matters may profitably compare it with Renan's article on the same subject, and mark the difference between a neophyte striving uncertainly to express judgments not yet clarified in his own mind, and one of the most accomplished and acutest critics of the age and an all but unrivalled master of style. In the comparison Stevenson appears very much the apprentice.

There were other articles for the *Britannica* written or projected, one especially, on Burns, for which the young author was paid five guineas, though the contribution was never used. In the course of a correspondence which followed its rejection Stevenson was obliged to confess, " I believe you are right in saying I had not said enough of what was highest and best in him. . . . The feet of clay are easier dealt with than the golden head." As we shall see, he reverted to the " feet of clay " again and omitted " the golden head " in a study almost as unworthy of him as it is of the genius of Robert Burns. His poem " Ille Terrarum," printed in *Underwoods*, and certain rather elaborate experiments in French forms of verse, of which Mr. Hellman and Professor Trent in the recovered and rescued fragments give several interesting examples, belong to that time.

## Experiments in Fiction

But just then his real strength went into fiction, though as yet without any decisive or, indeed, very

promising results. He talked much of a " long short story," called with a characteristic touch of cynicism, " When the Devil was Well." Scene and characters were Italian of a picturesquely-remote age—the fifteenth century, to be exact—and the ingredients, meant to be the essence of passion and romance, were a poet, a painter, a sculptor, and a beautiful duchess. He was much in love with it, though Henley and others found it unsatisfactory and advised him to commit it to the flames. That advice, however, was not taken. The manuscript was preserved, and in 1921 the story in its complete form was privately printed by the Bibliophile Society of Boston, with an introduction by Professor Trent, based on notes furnished by Mr. George S. Hellman. To-day it has a special interest as Stevenson's first extant work in fiction.

Two short stories, " King Matthias's Hunting Horn " and " The Two Falconers of Cairnstane," which were designed as part of a series of at least a dozen, were destroyed. The waste of effort is amazing, and indicates that Stevenson's gifts as a story-teller developed with exceeding slowness and difficulty. He complained that the creative effort, though not as yet in any way exceptional, exhausted him. Nor is this surprising. An essay, a sketch are, comparatively speaking, easy things. A work of creative art, a work that breathes of life and presents humanity, as it were, in the act, that exhibits the forces of destiny at play, making or marring human lives—such a work is and always must be supremely difficult and exhausting. In the " fine frenzy " of creation, the novelist writes with his heart's blood, and the more intense his imaginative effort, the more he con-

centrates and vitalises his characters, the more he exhausts his own essential vitality. For it is only when virtue passes out of him that his characters begin to live.

As yet Stevenson, the engaging discursive essayist, lacked the power necessary for a sustained work of fiction. He was to progress splendidly, in the end he was to take a bounding leap as of a sudden acess of gathered strength. That is why in force and sweep of imagination—and in great literature that is the final and decisive test—the Stevenson of *Weir of Hermiston* is as far above and beyond the Stevenson of *Memoirs and Portraits* as Shakespeare is above and beyond Montaigne, or Scott is above and beyond Hazlitt.

But meanwhile he was experimenting zealously if not very forcibly. Two hours of story-telling left him "shaky and crying," with a backache from sheer emotional strain. That is a significant confession, for in his nature work emotional intensity is nowhere a distinguishing quality. But of that I shall have something to say later.

Domestic relations were now running so smoothly that when he "passed advocate" he was to receive £1,000 from his father, a glittering prospect to the impecunious young author. The gift was meant to support him during the lean years at the Bar; but Louis appears to have taken the promise of such riches as an incentive to persevere in his chosen career. While others were talking law and picturing him as advocate and judge, he was offering Appleton of the *Academy* a series of papers on some French writers—de Banville, Coppée, and other moderns. The offer was not accepted, but Appleton allowed him to review J. H. Ingram's edition of the works of Poe an article which led to

an acrimonious correspondence between reviewed and reviewer.

He was still, too, a traveller. In the beginning of April he was off to join his cousin, Bob Stevenson, at Fontainebleau, the first of many visits to a place which was destined to play a fateful part in his life. A year later, in May 1876, his impressions were given in the *Cornhill* under the title of "Forest Notes," a delightful sketch written in his brightest early manner. It was a flying visit. By mid-April he was again in Scotland, in Edinburgh, then at Bridge of Allan with his father; and a few days later at Swanston with Charles Baxter and Walter Simpson. Towards the end of the month he made his final appearance in the Fleeming Jenkin theatricals, as Orsino in "Twelfth Night," playing the character with all the glory of Solomon in raiment "heavy with gold and stage jewellery." In mid-July came the call to the Bar, as already described. Parliament House had scant enough interest in literature; but it had heard of the eccentric Louis Stevenson, and once as he appeared someone, parodying Wordsworth, laughed sarcastically, "Here comes the marvellous boy." Though cut to the quick, the victim of this pleasantry could find no retort. As Henley observed, though fluent enough in talk he was never ready or apt in repartee. Later, in lampooning an obnoxious member of the Savile Club who had rudely repulsed his advances, he made the offender confess—

> I am a kind of farthing dip,
> Unfriendly to the nose and eyes—

an achievement in satire which scarcely marks its author for a place beside Pope or Burns.

By the end of July he was off once more, this

time with Sir Walter Simpson to Fontaineblau, tramping vigorously and enjoying the scenery and open air to the immense advantage of his health. One excursion up the valley of the Loing ended ignominiously for Louis in a prison cell at Chêtillon-sur-Loing, where he proved a little too Bohemian even for the French police. They flatly declined to believe that so disreputable-looking a person could possibly be what he claimed to be—a reputable British citizen taking a holiday. He was a pedlar, an imposter bent on some nefarious scheme. Therefore, declining to hear his protests, or at any rate declining to heed them, they incontinently clapped him in jail, pending investigation. Not even the palpable, solid British respectability of his companion saved him.

Other adventures due to similar causes were to follow; but Louis, though often angry and disgusted, was not cured of his Bohemianism. Liberated after some formalities, he shook the dust of Loing off his feet, met his parents at Wiesbaden, and with them finished his holiday at Homburg and Mantz. Inevitably the Chêtillon episode provided him with the chance of making picturesque "copy"; for he had the journalistic faculty for turning all experiences and adventures to account. "How do journalists fetch up their drivel?" he wrote long afterwards, when groaning in the agonies of composition. He ought to have known, for much of his own work, both early and late, is journalism, ornate and highly wrought, but unmistakably journalism. This is no disparagement. Thackeray and Dickens were both journalists, only they did not speak loftily of "fetching up drivel." His efforts just then, indeed, were mostly confined to journalistic work for the

*Academy* and *Vanity Fair*. Not all he proposed or wrote was accepted, but to *Vanity Fair* in December 1875 he contributed a slashing review of Browning's "Inn Album," which caused him much gloating exultation. He praised the matter; but the manner he found a subject for boisterous mirth. "I have slated R. B. pretty handsomely," was his own judgment, the inference being that R. B. did not understand the art of poetry, or at any rate form in poetry, as R. L. S. understood it. Later, at the house of Mr. Sidney Colvin, the poet and his reviewer met, and there is no sign that Browning remembered or resented the attack. The chances are that it was entirely unknown to him.

A feverish restlessness still possessed Louis, making it a species of torture to remain long in one place. In January 1876 he undertook a tour, mostly on foot, by Ayr, Girvan, Maybole, Ballantrae (where he selpt a night) Stranraer, and Wigton, as usual with the journalist's eye to "copy." The result was "A Winter's Walk in Carrick and Galloway," which appeared in a summer number of the *Illustrated London News*. Returning home as "fit as a fiddle," he plunged into literary work with renewed zest. In April came the *Academy* article on Salvini's "Macbeth" which roused the ire of Fleeming Jenkin and brought the charge of egotism already noted. In June his paper on "Walking Tours" was printed in the *Cornhill*. More important still, the August number of that magazine contained Part I of "Virginibus Puersque," the paper on Charles of Orleans following in the December number. These contributions owed much to the sympathetic, but not always flattering, criticism of Leslie Stephen. In those leisurely days editors had time to enter

into long, detailed correspondence with contributors, an editorial practice which has almost completely gone out of fashion, very much, one fears, to the detriment of periodical literature.

In spring Stevenson paid yet another flying visit to the Fontainebleau region—Barbizon, Grez, Montigny—where he spent a few weeks with a colony of artists of various nationalities, recently migrated from Paris for better opportunity to work. But in July he was in Edinburgh and at Swanston, discussing play-writing and other literary projects with Henley. Part of August he spent with the Jenkins in the neighbourhood of Loch Carron, imbibing the Highland spirit which permeates so much of his work and pursuing the illusion of a Celtic ancestry, an illusion that, as we know, remained with him to the end. From the Highlands he returned to Edinburgh ; as it proved, to plunge suddenly back into the old life, the old modes of gaiety, which had caused so much distress, censure, and acerbity. A bewildering spirit of recklessness appears to have seized him. The old haunts were revisited, the old pleasures, euphemistically called Bohemian, were renewed with an abandon of self-indulgence which might well inspire the moralist to pungent homilies on the eccentricities of human folly. An independent but warmly-sympathetic critic has truthfully remarked that Stevenson " was never, in his early life at least, ostracised by his friends for his spotless and unworldly purity."

One contemporary witness has borne incontrovertible testimony to the incidents of that period. Henley had by that time left the hospital, and was in private quarters where he was able to receive his friends with the robust and joyous hospitality which

always characterised him. He saw much of Louis, and knew, as no other person then alive, the secrets of his life. It was to that time he referred in his famous article when he wrote of nursing Stevenson "in secret [at 21 Lothian Street] hard by the old Bristo Port till he could make shift to paddle the *Arethusa*."[1] Moreover, among Stevenson's papers there was recently found a fragment, "The Story of a Recluse," which, though apparently written some ten years later, contains clear autobiographic touches bearing on the events of the late summer of 1876.

## "The Eternal Woman by the Wayside"

Happily the aberration was brief, and Louis, sufficiently restored to health, crossed to Antwerp to prepare for the canoeing expedition with Sir Walter Simpson described with picturesque detail in *An Inland Voyage*. Before undertaking it, however, he surprised his friend Mr. Will H. Low, the well-known American artist, by appearing in Paris avid for news of Barbizon and Grez. What he heard filled him with a comical horror. Grez, the chief artistic centre of the moment, had hitherto been an Eveless Eden. Now a woman had dared to set foot on ground sacred to man alone, and had settled there serenely as one who had a right to dwell where she pleased. Stevenson listened dolefully to the tale of this invasion by a petticoat. "It is the beginning of the end," he remarked tragically—"the beginning of the end."

[1] He was "taken in" by Henley because he had in effect been turned out-of-doors by his father. On another occasion, and for a similar reason, he shared Henley's room for three months.

Perturbed and excited, he hastened to Montigny, which lies some two miles distant from Grez. There finding the disquieting tidings confirmed, he dispatched his cousin, Bob Stevenson, a member of the artistic community, to reconnoitre and report. Bob did not return, and Simpson, recently arrived on the spot, was sent to find him. As he too tarried, the impatient Louis set off by himself to investigate, incited, doubtless, by the element of mystery and adventure. It was almost as good as stalking imaginary Indians in the garden of Colinton Manse or chasing imaginary pirates on an imaginary Spanish Main. As he reached the little inn where the intruder was quartered night was falling. The weather being soft and warm, the windows were wide open. As Louis approached, treading cautiously as a hunter tracking down game, the sound of voices in gay and animated talk floated out on the still air.

Next minute in the soft lamplight he caught sight of those within. He paused to take note. There were two women, one in the maturity of early middle age, the other a girl in her teene, besides a small boy of ten and the defaulting Bob and Simpson, with some other diners. Stevenson gazed, all his senses in his eyes, his gaze resting especially on the elder woman, sitting quietly, dressed in black. She was Fanny Van de Grift Osbourne, and Stevenson confessed that with him it was a case of love at the first glimpse through an open window. Vibrating with excitement, he entered abruptly, almost like a character in transpontine melodrama. In the familiar old story a certain man came to curse and stayed to bless. The dramatic allegory was repeated in the experience of Stevenson. He forgot his indignation over the

sacrilege of feminine intrusion. The " eternal woman waiting by the wayside " of whom he had sung was here, waiting, as it turned out, for him, and he surrendered at sight.

Mrs. Osbourne, living apart from her husband, had come to France partly for peace, partly to study art and educate her children—a daughter of seventeen and two boys. The younger of the boys, Hervey, aged five, had recently died in Paris, and his mother's grief was still green. But the advent of the lively, talkative Scot with the ingratiating manner gave life a new and romantic zest. The gallant had " a way with him " ; the lady was lonely and depressed. Here were all the elements of romance, with obstacles that seemed insurmountable added for piquancy.

Mrs. Osbourne had been married at seventeen to a youth of twenty with good looks and an all-too-easy disposition. She was now in her thirty-seventh year, while Louis was in his twenty-sixth, but the difference in age was apparently rather an incentive than a hindrance. At any rate, the acquaintance speedily developed into friendship, the friendship into something more romantic and glowing. In character Mrs. Osbourne was a woman of much force, and her gifts both as artist and writer were considerable. In physique she was small, square, and compact of figure, with black hair and dusky complexion of what may roughly be called the gipsy type. Her eyes too were dark and at least as ready to flash in anger as melt in pity. Her chin was a pattern of firmness, and her mouth in moments of displeasure could shut with traplike decisiveness. She appears to have been of Swedish–Dutch extraction, but her progenitors on both sides had for generations been American.

It has been stated "officially" that Stevenson first met her on his return from the canoeing trip with Sir Walter Simpson. The statement is wrong. The meeting took place before, not after, that trip, which the now ardent Stevenson, indeed, was disposed to regard as a disagreeable interruption of his love-making. Of the expedition itself and the exploits of *Cigarette* and *Arethusa* his own account may be read in *An Inland Voyage*. The descriptions have touches of vivid reality, for Stevenson had not forgotten Henley's admonition to keep his "eye on the object"; but the work lacks ease and freedom of movement. It is on the whole self-conscious and somewhat too strenuously and laboriously light, with spasms of the fantastic which reveal the still-unconquered impishness of the juvenile Stevenson. Readers may trace in it the influence of *A Sentimental Journey*, with something of the *Reisebilder*, though the arch, irresponsible whimsicality of Sterne and the clear Grecian charm of Heine were as yet equally beyond its author. His own opinion was that "it is not badly written, thin, mildly cheery and strained," a critical self-judgment which no impartial reader will be likely to dispute.

In the Loing Valley walking-trip Stevenson's disreputable, tramp-like appearance caused trouble, and one of the most amusing passages in the *Voyage* is the account of his treatment by the disgusted, irate hostess of La Fêre, who was every whit as sure of his evil character and intentions as the police superintendent at Chêtillon. In other respects the experiences of the canoeists were neither comic nor exhilarating, though Stevenson, with his habitual cheerfulness, made light of them. The weather was execrable, there were difficulties

and discomforts with lodgings, and once, in colliding with a fallen tree in the swollen Oise, Louis narrowly escaped drowning by clambering, drenched and shaken, on to the half-submerged trunk. "I have fought it through in the worst weather I ever saw in France," he reported to Henley. The outdoor life, however, was wholesome and bracing, and despite hardships his health benefited. Every morning he was awake at six, and generally he was asleep by half-past nine in the evening. "If that isn't healthy," he exclaimed, "egad! I wonder what is."

Healthy it was, and to bodily well-being was added a delectable expectancy yet more exhilarating. Mrs. Osbourne was waiting for him at Grez, and to her he hastened with an impatient ardour which his conventional, phlegmatic, slow-moving companion, Walter Simpson, found somewhat embarrassing. At that moment there was little enough of the Shorter Catechist, little enough of the Calvinist or Covenanter, in the eager, enraptured Louis. Then and always he pursued the desire of his heart as if it were the one thing that mattered, as, in fact, it was to him. Despite legal obstacles which most men would have thought insurmountable, he appeared frankly in the character of a hero of romance, a short of young Lochinvar who scoffed at difficulties and conventions; and at no point does he seem to have suffered the mortification of a repulse. The bereaved mother, the aggrieved and dejected wife, gradually forgot her grief, her wrecked happiness, and joined in the general life of the gay, hearty, companionable little community.

A favourite resort was the leafy, fragrant inn garden. There in the soft evenings under a

spreading tree Mrs. Osbourne would swing bewitchingly in a hammock, "looking prettier and prettier," while Louis, in duck-trousers, frayed velvet jacket, and tasselled smoking-cap, sat close by reading aloud, extolling Walt Whitman or chipping in with boats and voyages to Simpson, who fanned himself patiently and listened and looked in wondering silence.

Possibly he was thinking what Heriot Row would say to this new business. But Heriot Row was not told of it; for, knowing too well what its judgment would be, Louis diplomatically bound his friends to secrecy. So that, contrary to Shakespeare's opinion, the course of true love ran smoothly, deliciously. If there were moments of doubt, of anxiety, they do not appear to have troubled Louis, who was perhaps too deeply engrossed to look or think beyond the passing moment.

> The present moment is our ain.
> The next we never saw—

sang the Poet of Scotland; and Louis was content to have it so. "The seasons crimsoned all things with their roses. Apollo sang to his lyre, while a little Pan prattled on his reeds; and Venus danced very sweetly to soft music," as in the ancient tale.

Sports and pastimes enlivened and invigorated the gaieties. There were canoeing contests on the river, somewhat on the model of "bumping" competitions on the Cam at Cambridge; there were water-excursions to Nemours and elsewhere, with studies of French peasant life and manners which the novelist providently stored away for future use. In hall there were improvised dances, and occasionally, when strolling players chanced to

come along, there were theatrical entertainments of a kind which would scarcely have passed muster at 3 Great Suart Street. One such incident pleasantly illustrates a notable phase of Stevenson's character. One evening two vagrant players, a man and his wife, appeared at the inn, ragged, hungry, forlorn, business having fallen to zero. Touched by their plight, Louis exerted himself, and a liberal purse was made up for them. In return they related their experiences and misfortunes on the road, recitals which Stevenson afterwards worked up into the short story "Providence and the Guitar." When two years later the story was printed and paid for, he sent the couple the whole amount received to help in educating their little hunchback daughter in Paris.

Nor were strolling players his only beneficiaries. If he had funds, no friend of his was allowed to suffer the hardship of empty pockets, for with quixotic chivalry he held it to be a crime against humanity to withhold aid in time of need. His ready munificence explains many of his financial straits both earlier and later. Froude remarks that, even when faced with starvation, Carlyle had something to spare for his own family. Stevenson's family needed no aid; but his purse was constantly open to others, a privilege of which some did not hesitate to take free advantage. A striking example of his sensitiveness on this point may here be mentioned. After reading some of Dickens's Christmas stories he felt so good, so generous, that he wished to go forth at once and do something for somebody in distress. "I shall never listen," he told Mrs. Sitwell, "to the nonsense they tell one about not giving money. I *shall* give money, not that I haven't done so always; but I shall do it

now with a high hand." In the same vein he pleaded with God to grant the people bread.

> Enough of bread for all—
> That through the famished town
> Cold hunger may lie down
> With none to-night.

If he had a thousand faults, the one great virtue of generosity was his in a measure that has rarely been surpassed.

In those early days he jested much about " the dibbs." Usually the " dibbs " were lamentably scarce, but during part at least of that time in France his pockets overflowed, the £1,000 promised to him " on passing advocate " having been paid. To have cash was to spend it as if he had but to dip his hand into a Fortunatus-purse, for, save under pressure of sheer necessity, he was rather markedly deficient in the Scottish virtue of thrift. His personal expenses, indeed, were extremely modest, for as with many another man of genius his wants were simple and easily supplied. He admired and imitated Dumas ; but he did not imitate the vauntful Alexandre's taste for showy extravagance in personal adornment. Whereas the author of *Monte Cristo* professed to be at his best in impeccable evening-dress, frilled, perfumed, and pomaded, Stevenson was most himself in the easy, negligent attire of a tramp. Tailors' and hatters' bills, high living at fashionable hotels, were almost negligible items in his expenditure. Nor were his pleasures really of the costly kind. Yet in France then and for some time afterwards his capital diminished with a rapidity which clearly denotes large acts of generosity. It was his delight to play Prince

Bountiful; and had he been thwarted he had probably been offended.

In his earlier visits to France, such time as he did not spend in Paris was spent mostly at Barbizon, which enchanted him by its quiet, quaint old-world charm. There in the picturesque Siron's inn, "that excellent artists' barrack," he enjoyed the freedom he loved, coming and going as he pleased at any hour of the day or night, and even helping himself from larder and cellar at his pleasure. For the Sirons, unlike most of their successors in the great business of hotel-keeping, were innocent and trustful. Once a week they made a general computation, and the gross sum due was divided by the number of guests, who paid each his equal share without question. It was a delectable communal system, recalling the golden age when honesty and honour were never suspect, and men had the faith and the courage to be brothers. One easily believes it had a unique and particular charm for Stevenson. The Sirons certainly lost nothing by their trust in human nature. There were other joys and advantages. Stevenson found it delightful, for instance, to wake in the morning breathing the wet odour of the forest. More delightful still, perhaps, was it to wander in the forest itself, drinking in its influences, to lie under a tree with a book, or lounge on the grass, watching and criticising his friends as they painted.

As in Edinburgh, he was accounted an idler, and in appearance he was idle, but in appearance only. Imagination was actively gathering impressions, devising, projecting, building airy castles, some of which were to materialise, to his own profit and the delight of mankind. Among the groves of Barbizon he enjoyed "glories of exhilaration," as

he told his mother; dreamed great dreams of works "that Shakespeare himself might be proud to have conceived"; such dreams and raptures, in fact, as with the creative artist must precede the actual work of creation. According to Horace a man does not change his nature by crossing the sea. The Stevenson of Barbizon, of Grez, of Montigny, of Paris, was precisely the Stevenson of Edinburgh and Swanston. What he wished to do he did, what he wished to have he took; and through all and in spite of all distractions he was steadfast in pursuing the great purpose of his life. "I am consistent in my schemes," he said of himself, and under all apparent idleness or aberration he was consistent with the consistency of iron.

## French Studies

Various tender interests kept him mostly at Grez throughout the late summer and early autumn of 1876. But he was frequently in Paris with his cousin Bob Stevenson, Will Low, and other members of the congenial, easy-going artistic set. Paris had always for him the charm of a boundless urbanity and catholicity. It was not censorious like Edinburgh; it knew nothing of the woes and terrors of the Shorter Catechism, and did not lose any sleep over the Ten Commandments. Moreover, in the great duty of happiness, as he understood and expounded it, the French were the artists of Europe. Even the sordid and squalid they touched with a sentiment of romance, or at any rate of gaiety and good breeding. They eschewed long faces, and did not lose their voices "singing anthems." Instinctively Stevenson was attracted. Not for

nothing had there come to him the Gallic heritage of which he was unaware, save by its impelling impulses in his blood. He had in truth two souls, in themselves strangely contradictory, one northern and Covenanting, the other southern and sensuously gay, and in certain characteristic moods the southern was dominant. Often it happened that he was as eager to escape from the frigid, numbing, moral atmosphere of his native city as from its sullen skies and blighting east winds. In Paris he found the sunshine that set his temperament in a glow.

And he made the most of his visits. He consorted with all sorts of people, put up in all sorts of lodgings, according to his humour or the state of his purse : sometimes in cheap hotels ; sometimes in an attic with a chair, a bed, and a bare deal table for furniture ; sometimes with roistering students in the Latin Quarter. Often he and his companions foraged in back streets and cheap markets for food, which they carried home and cooked themselves. To the vagabond disposition it was delightful to lead a nomad life in a populous city, to be Arabs and even Ishmaelites, at the very heart of civilisation. Occasionally the Lenten fare was varied by bursts of luxury with lobster mayonnaise, kidneys, " lots of Carton," and other breakfast delicacies. Nor were adventures lacking to spice the brimming cup of Bohemianism. One illuminative incident was described by Andrew Lang. In a café one day a blustering Frenchman remarked sneeringly that the English were cowards. Stevenson, who sat close by, instantly sprang to his feet and hit the traducer across the face.

" Monsieur, vous m'avez frappé," roared the infuriated Frenchman.

"A ce qu'il parait," was the cool response. Friends intervened, and, fortunately perhaps for the fragile but undaunted Scot, the matter ended there.

A more amusing incident occurred one night as Stevenson was leaving the Théâtre Français after a performance of the *Demi Monde* by the younger Dumas, then a popular idol in Paris. He had come forth in a fury of indignation with the piece, and in his blind haste tramped on the toes of an old gentleman. He turned to apologise, but repented in the act. "No," he said truculently; "you are one of the *lâches* who have been applauding that play." The retort was a delicious lesson in manners. "The old gentleman," Stevenson related later, "laid his hand on my arm and said, with a smile that was truly heavenly in its temperance, irony, and good nature, 'Ah! monsieur, vous êtes bien jeune.'"

But these things were, so to speak, mere incidentals. To Stevenson the real interest, the real business, was the intensive study of French life, character, and literature. He had already written with insight and appreciation of Victor Hugo. Part of his present studies were to bear fruit in his essay on Villon, and yet more vividly in *A Lodging for the Night*, in which Villon again appears in all the lustre of unredeemed villainy. In *The Wrecker* and some other works, scenes and personal experiences of that time in Paris are reproduced with remarkable fidelity; for Stevenson had this in common with Byron, that he could not help dropping into autobiography.

He tried to read in public libraries, but the attempt was a failure. "In public offices of all kinds," he confessed, "I feel like Esther before

Ahasuerus." Finding the libraries impossible, he made a habit of stealing off alone to the second-hand bookstalls on the Quai Voltaire and similar places by the Seine, and return panting under a burden of books, meant not for light reading but for strenuous study. French influences were then, in fact, moulding his middle style, the style which lies midway between that of the early essays, when he was almost wholly imitative, and that of the later romances, when he was passing beyond imitation. From the first Montaigne and Dumas had been his models. To them with varying degrees of effect were added Molière, Voltaire, Rochefoucald, Michelet, Baudelaire, De Musset, Sainte-Beuve, Flaubert, Daudet, the earlier writings of Bourget, Anatole France, and others. Even "the troughs of Zolaism" were not neglected. And being still imitative, though with growing discrimination, still seeking examples and suggestions in the literary art, he read intensely, critically, with every faculty on the alart, noting the apt word, the telling phrase, the exquisite harmony, urbanity, and precision in which French prose at its best excels.

Flaubert, the most arduous and anxious cultivator of style in a nation of stylists, might and did reveal to him a passion even more absorbing, more intense than his own for the *mot juste*, the exact and only word; and whereas he had hitherto been a mere dilettante preoccupied with the fripperies, the externals or petty details of his craft, Flaubert's torturing anxiety was to secure literal accuracy of presentation, in other words, so to purge and clarify form that it should mirror with absolute truth the contents of his own mind or imagination as he wished them to be seen or known. According

to his theory, for every idea there is the one peculiar word or phrase, and his own practice resolved itself into a painful, often a morbid, search for the severe accuracy which that theory imposes. Hence a scrupulous sincerity in communicating to the reader his own vision or image of things, and a conviction, frequently expressed in his letters, that success in that delicate and difficult task is the last triumph of style. Banality, vagueness, flabbiness, the facile second-hand expression; the foppery of euphemism for its own sake, were to him equal crimes against art and truth. For he was of Fuller's mind, that "to clothe low-creeping matter with high-flown language is not a fine fancy but a flat foolery. It rather loads than raises a wren to fasten the feathers of an ostrich to her wings."

Stevenson, it may be thought, found some of his own pet theories demolished, but he was far too sincere a student, far too acute a critic, far too intent on his life's purpose, to ignore the lesson or its import. Lowell notes how "fame's great antiseptic, Style," makes for immortality in literature. Flaubert, perhaps more than any other, taught Stevenson, as he taught many another young writer, that while style is the best preservative to make it effective, there must be something to preserve. Macaulay, in defending his own style against some strictures by Napier, editor of the *Edinburgh Review*, remarked pertinently, "The first rule of all writing—that rule to which every other is subordinate—is that the words used by the writer shall be such as most fully and precisely convey his meaning to the great body of his readers. All considerations about dignity and purity of style ought to bend to this consideration."

As a result of his new studies Stevenson was

seized with an enthusiasm for vividness, for making the reader, willy-nilly, see and feel by sheer force of presentation (as with Hugo), the effort to woo him by subtlety and charm of style being tedious and uncertain. He was, in fact, making the discovery which sooner or later comes to every artist in letters filled with illusions of beauty, that the public is blindly indifferent to style, and indeed is rather puzzled than pleased by any unusual display of dexterity in the manipulation of language. It reads to be amused, thrilled, melted, to laugh and weep, to wallow in sentiment or scream over farce. Only an eccentric few, and those in moments of aberration, read to think or to gratify the æsthetic sense; and since appreciation of style involves a certain mental tension or alertness, the exercise is rarely popular. Of nothing is the general reader more chary than of thought, which he, and more specially she, dismisses disdainfully as dry and dull.

Stevenson, being an artist in grain, learned much from Flaubert, and this in particular, that the right word is inevitably the vivid word, since it best expresses or describes reality. Flaubert, then, did much for the ardent student, and to precept he added example. He wrote *Madame Bovary*, a brilliant book which triumphantly illustrated all his own principles of composition, yet for all its brilliancy appeared strangely cramped and constipated. Stevenson saw the master's defect. With all his splendid qualities, his devotion and enthusiasm, the great Frenchman lacked just the one thing needful—a large and generous freedom. Others had it and prospered gloriously. The great romancers Scott, Dumas, Hugo, were universally popular, not because they were stylists, but because they realised the vividness of life and set themselves

with glowing imaginations to reproduce it. What they did he would do.

To be the darling of a coterie, to be relished by fastidious eclectics as a writer of exquisite taste and skill, was sweet, but sweeter still was the thought of winning the suffrages of the immense promiscuous crowd, the genial Philistines who buy books with no regard whatever to their æsthetic beauty or value. Several years were to pass before success came to him; but his real start as a writer of romantic fiction dates from the French influences of that time. "If a thing is meant to be read," he remarked, in his new-found zeal, "it is just as well to make it readable." The sentiment marks a new departure, a new ideal of his craft. The essayist was disappearing, the novelist coming into view.

Summer passed into autumn. In mid-October he left Mrs. Osbourne and the congenial artistic fraternity at Grez and returned to Edinburgh, with some vague, half-implied intention to take up practice at the Bar. His father was not yet reconciled to the idea of literature as a career, indeed, he continued to protest vehemently that Louis was wasting his time and ruining his prospects. Law was at least respectable, and a potential judge in the family was a more heartening object than a nondescript author struggling for a foothold. Besides, success as an advocate would in some measure atone for failure as an engineer. But solicitors were miserly with briefs, and Louis had the excuse that nobody desired to employ him, not even in the interest of picturesque criminals who might provide rich material for fiction. To placate the paternal conscience, there were perfunctory attendances at Parliament House, but soon they

dwindled and ceased, and wig and gown were discarded for ever.

Fortunately Henley was still in Edinburgh, and with him, Fleeming Jenkin, and Charles Baxter the old intimacies were revived. In the house in Great Stuart Street, Henley and Jenkin disputed hotly but amicably over the right use of the English language, Louis in his sprite-like way chiming in with quip and paradox to keep the argument lively. In January he was again in London associating with old friends and making new ones, mostly at the Savile Club. There, one day, Mr. Colvin introduced him to Mr. Edmund G. Gosse, the critic and poet. Six years before they had met casually as fellow-passengers on a West Highland steamer southward bound from Portree in Skye, met and parted as tourists do. The second meeting marked the beginning of a friendship which lasted as long as Stevenson's life ; and few contemporaries have written of his work both in prose and verse with more insight and appreciation than has Mr. Gosse. Louis's liveliness and gaiety enchanted his new acquaintance. " A childlike mirth leaped and danced in him," wrote Mr. Gosse, in describing the meeting. " He seemed to skip on the hills of life." Louis just then had an inordinate fondness for joking ; but it is significant of the quality of his jokes that they appear to have been forgotten almost as soon as heard. The truth is, he was in one of his highly-febrile, half-hysterical moods that made repose or self-possession impossible.

Being in funds, he crossed from London to France, hurrying on to Grez, where Mrs. Osbourne was still pursuing her art-studies. He was soon back in Edinburgh, where he passed the spring of

1877, again seeing much of Henley, Fleeming Jenkin, and Charles Baxter.

In May, the French influences being active, he was deep in a novel, *The Hair Trunk ; or, the Ideal Commonwealth*. The scene was laid in the Navigator Islands, where a company of Cambridge student-adventurers founded a new society which apparently was to set an example of freedom and happiness to a world suffering from too much civilisation. The adventures were wild and weird, and some of the " comic business " appealed to Henley ; but the general judgment was that it would not do, and it was destroyed. Meanwhile its author had adventures of his own on hand, and for part of June and July he was again at Grez, the attraction there being irresistible.

A second canoeing trip with Sir Walter Simpson had been planned some time previously, the course to be by the Loing, the Loire, and the Rhone to the Mediterranean. It was, however, abandoned for a more ambitious and romantic scheme evolved by the ingenious brain of Bob Stevenson. This was nothing less than a leisurely vagabond pilgrimage among the canals and lesser rivers of Europe in a travelling houseboat. Simpson, the financier of the droll little society, proposed a joint-stock company in which all should take equal shares. Under his direction, and mainly out of his own pocket, funds were raised, a barge was purchased and with noble generosity christened *The Eleven Thousand Virgins of Cologne*. It was a common little river cargo-boat, but it was to be transformed into a floating palace of delight, with cosy rooms and elaborate decorations, as Bob suggested, " of pink Cupids rolling on pink clouds and that sort of ruck," also with books in the cabins, well-filled

tobacco-jars, old Burgundy and other pleasurable commodities, something perhaps less regal than Cleopatra's gorgeous barge, but in exquisite harmony with the tastes and aspirations of its owners. The beauty-to-be was taken to Moret, a village near Grez at the junction of the Loing and the Seine, and moored in the river for reconstruction. The result is amusingly described by Stevenson himself, how for a little there was immense enthusiasm with " emulous labour " and a free flow of champagne. But, alas ! finances went awry and the *Eleven Thousand Virgins* " rotted in the stream where she was beautified." In the end she was seized and sold by the contractor ; and with her went the *Arethusa* and the *Cigarette*. So dissolved in bankruptcy a beautiful and romantic dream of vagabond adventure.

The alluring project of a canal and river pilgrimage having evaporated ignominiously, Stevenson reluctantly returned to Edinburgh ; but in August he was off once more, this time to Penzance with his parents. After a short stay duty called Thomas Stevenson home, and Louis and his mother went on to the Scilly Isles. He found Cornwall bleak—bleaker than the bleakest parts of Scotland. But luckily he had resources within himself, resources which kept his pen ceaselessly busy. More and more French influences were telling both in style and choice of theme.

His vivid, and in some respects repulsive, Villon story, " A Lodging for the Night," appeared in the October number of *Temple Bar ;* and in the following January " The Sire de Malétroit's Door " was printed in the same magazine, both with warm editorial commendation. He was also happily busy for the *Cornhill*, where the guiding

hand of Leslie Stephen was proving invaluable. His " half-revealing, half-concealing " little sketch " On Falling in Love " appeared in the number for February 1877; and in July followed " An Apology for Idlers," one of the most characteristic, as it is one of the most charming, of his minor pieces, though it had been declined by George Grove for *Macmillan's*. In the next number came " Francis Villon: Student, Poet, and House-breaker," a character-study done with rare zest and penetration.

Not all he wrote, however, was accepted. The well-known essay " Some Portraits by Raeburn," written then, went a round of the Press in vain. Leslie Stephen felt obliged to decline it for the *Cornhill*, and it was rejected in turn by the *Pall Mall Gazette* and *Blackwood's Magazine*. In Edinburgh there are two popular periodicals, *Blackwood's* and *Chambers's Journal*, yet to neither was Stevenson ever a contributor.

From Cornwall he hastened back to France, where he passed the next three months in a state of high tension, flitting to and fro between Paris, Barbizon, and Grez. More than ever he was the gallant and the Prince Bountiful. Like his own Florizel (in whom we may trace lineaments of his creator), he was distinguished by a courtly grace and a royal, open-handed generosity. Hawthorne has ventured the opinion that a man of genius can always be a man of affairs if he cares to take the trouble. Shakespeare and Voltaire are instances in point, the one as an actor-manager, the other as an army contractor.

But Stevenson was not born with a talent for business. In particular the money-sense, with which his countrymen are thought to be super-

abundantly endowed, was denied him. Though he might know what thrift should be, he never really knew what it was. Money, in his judgment, was meant to be spent, not hoarded or set out to usury. Consequently, being able to put his theories into practice during those visits to France, he spent gaily, prodigally, as if the miracle of the widow's cruse of oil were a commonplace to be repeated at will in daily experience. In Paris it was his delight to entertain small companies of friends at some noted restaurant with a reputation for cuisine and wines. He bought pictures, too, not for his own gratification, but solely to help needy artists. Equally to the purpose he induced the good-natured, diffident, easy-going Simpson to follow his example.

"A heavy purse," says the proverb, "makes a light heart." Money, however, was not the only nor the chief incentive to gaiety—his health, comparatively speaking, was excellent. Yet even then, when the world seemed at last to be smiling upon him in more ways than one, he had moments of utter weariness and depression as if there were nothing left worth living for. At times he was weary even of love. In a little piece written about that time, and given by Mr. Hellman in one of the Bibliophile Society's volumes, this mood finds touching expression :

> The rain is over and done :
> I am aweary, dear, of love.
> . . . . . .
> And love's so slow and time so long,
> And hearts and eyes so blindly wrong,
> I am half weary of my love,
> And pray that life were done.

They understand little of Robert Louis Stevenson who picture him as a creature all fire and air,

revelling Puck-like in perpetual levity and light-heartedness. No man of his gifts and craft ever did or ever can so revel ; for unbroken, unruffled gaiety would be an impossible contradiction of the creative spirit. Every imaginative artist, whether he be painter or writer, has his moments of crushing gloom. For if imagination excites and exhilarates to raptures unknown to the stolid and phlegmatic, it also sinks to depths which, happily for themselves, they never plumb. A wise man has said that for every gift a price must be paid ; and imagination, the highest of all human faculties, takes heavy, often cruel, toll of its possessors. Stevenson, like other gifted men, had the defects of his qualities. If his mercurial temperament leaped up in the sun, it plunged as quickly to zero in the shade. In public before men's eyes he was most strenuously cheerful, for, like an actor on the stage, he had a part to play. But alone with himself, and looking before and after, he was a different man. Then, indeed, he justified Henley's " of Hamlet most of all " Yes ! of Hamlet most of all. And the Hamlet moods were paralysing.

In his present situation there was much to cause mental tumult and confusion. He was, in fact, as one struggling in the very grip of Fate. He had met the woman he desired above all other women in the world, and she belonged to another. It was not in his nature to give in or give up. The poet might sing, half jauntily, " Let Love Go." The man could not accommodate himself so easily to the sentiment. The great question was, What should he do ? The counsel of friends was not sought ; and volunteered, it would have been an impertinence. To those at home he dared not so much as breathe a word of what was in his heart.

The novelist dealing impersonally with such a situation would have turned it to dramatic use, extracting elements that would fascinate and thrill the reader. But Fate is not a novelist, creating difficulties in order that she may deal out poetic justice to her creatures. Between Stevenson and the desire of his heart stood the frowning, formidable figure of the law; and behind the law were certain other figures still more formidable. And at home there were other complications to which fuller reference will be made later. The agitation, the feverish alternations of delirious hope and numbing gloom affected his literary activities, his only work of importance then being the completion of his account of the canoeing trip made a year before.

In November he returned to Edinburgh, but found the place unbearably dreary. The weather was of the worst Edinburgh sort—wet, sleety, squally, and piercingly cold. Compelled to be much indoors, he amused himself in his room at 17 Heriot Row with the boyish game of building with toy-bricks, and had passing dreams of being an architect. His friend Henley, who had helped to make Edinburgh tolerable, was gone, or was leaving to take up a journalistic career in London; and his departure seemed to emphasise the general dreariness. "Not again," he said to himself, thinking of the sunshine he had left—"not again, Auld Reekie, if I can help it." And, indeed, so far as residence in his native city went, that autumn marked the beginning of the end.

One charming experience, however, came to him just then. It is a red-letter day in the career of a young author when he receives his first real letter of appreciation from a stranger, with words that

affect like wine. To Stevenson it came from far-off Melbourne, the writer being Patchett Martin, later well known to English and Australian readers as a critic and poet. He had been reading the "Virginibus Pueresque" papers in the *Cornhill*, and in return for the delight so derived sent Stevenson a small volume of his own verse, *A Sweet Girl Graduate, and other Poems*. Pleased and flattered, Stevenson responded cordially, praising some of the poems, as well as certain critical articles which accompanied them, advising his correspondent to read *Clarissa Harlowe*, and ending up with a characteristic little eulogy on egotism.

That was in December 1877. On the 1st of January 1878 he was at Dieppe on his way to Paris, where he lodged at various addresses, with frequent absences at Grez. He was finishing *An Inland Voyage*, which appeared in the following May with the imprint of Kegan, Paul & Co. It is interesting and significant to recall that the price paid to him for the copyright of the book was £20, and that the publishers were by no means elated over their bargain. Considerable excisions were made in the original manuscript, part of the opening chapter being omitted, as well as one or two autobiographical touches which came so naturally to the author. One of the suppressed parts was a detailed and amusing description of a dispute with Customs officials at Antwerp regarding dues on the two canoes, the *Arethusa* and the *Cigarette;* the other an account of an angry scene caused by an official demand for a passport. Stevenson, it will be remembered, was often in difficulties with foreign officials because of his queer, un-British appearance. "If he goes without his passport he is cast into noisome dungeons," he wrote of

himself. " He is a born British subject, yet he has never succeeded in persuading a single official of his nationality." The official incredulity is not surprising, for anything less like the typical John Bull than Robert Louis Stevenson could scarcely be imagined.

In the present instance he vowed it was an insult to be asked for a passport, and, as an independent Briton standing fast on his dignity, flatly refused to show it. The consequence was that he was placed behind bars. Simpson (Cigarette) counselled compliance.

" But, man, show them and be done with it," he said, no doubt feeling the absurdity of the situation.

" I'll be damned if I do," was the defiant answer. " What's the good of treaties ? You have no Union Jackery about you. And, mind you, it's a fundamental part of my character." In the end, however, the irate Arethusa handed over his passport with a " Voilà, monsieur, mais remarquez bien je proteste," and in " glances of contemptuous enmity " on both sides the incident closed.

When the book appeared, one or two reviewers said some consoling things about " promise," but for the most part they were callously indifferent. On his own part Stevenson seems to have treated the whole matter as a joke. When the work was finished and sold he wrote lightheartedly, as a sort of half-sarcastic epilogue—

> Who would think herein to look.
> That from these exiguous bounds
> I have dug a printed book,
> And a cheque for twenty pounds.
> Thus do those who trust the Lord
> Go rejoicing on their way.

The public shared the indifference of the critics. Part of the small first edition was " remaindered," a fate which has befallen many famous books at the outset of their careers. To-day the chief interest of the work lies in the fact that it was Stevenson's first definite, deliberate appeal for the suffrages of the larger public which extends its reading beyond magazines and newspapers. These are popular, but to the artist in letters they do not make for reputation. " The book's the thing " ; but though the book in this case found its way into eclectic circles, it left the great public untouched. Stevenson affected to be pleased, but not intoxicated. He had taken the plunge, run the gauntlet and survived. The effect of such criticism as there was, was to quicken ambition and stiffen the resolution to conquer. More resolutely than ever he could trumpet the comrade's call—

> Come—where the great have trod,
> The great shall lead—
> Come, elbow through the press,
> Pluck Fortune by the dress—
> By God, we must—by God,
> We shall succeed.

If the grammar is not impeccable, the sentiment is rousing, and represents the settled determination of its author.

There were grateful successes to keep the flame burning. In the January number of the *Cornhill* was printed " Will o' the Mill." He was prepared for rejection by Leslie Stephen, but, to his delight, the story was not only accepted but elicited warm editorial appreciation. Of all his early stories, " Will o' the Mill " was Stevenson's own chief

favourite, and many good judges share his partiality. Written with a drugged, dreamy softness of style and imagery, the fable makes a vague haunting appeal to the imagination which fascinates many readers. The model, the inspiration, at least in part, was, I think, Landor, a writer whom Stevenson undoubtedly read for his classic qualities of style. Here is a passage from *The Pentameron* which seems to anticipate, indeed to breathe, the very spirit of Will : " The milder and calmer Genius (Death), the third, in proportion as I took courage to contemplate him, regarded me with more and more complacency. He held neither flower nor arrow, as the others did ; but, throwing back the cluster of dark curls that overshadowed his countenance, he presented to me his hand, openly and benignly. I shrank on looking at him so near, and yet I sighed to love him. He smiled, not without an expression of pity, at perceiving my diffidence, my timidity ; for I remembered how soft was the hand of Sleep, how warm and entrancing was Love's. By degrees I became ashamed of my ingratitude ; and, turning my face away, I held out my arms and felt my neck within his. Composure strewed and allayed all the throbbings of my bosom ; the coolness of freshest morning breathed around ; the heavens seemed to open above me, while the beautiful cheek of my deliverer rested on my head."

In a preface meant for *The Merry Men*, but for some inexplicable reason not printed in the volume so entitled, Stevenson wrote, " I hope I should admire ' Will o' the Mill ' and ' Markheim ' as much if they had been written by someone else ; but I am glad no one else wrote them." Later, however, when he had found himself, he hotly

repudiated the philosophy of " Will o' the Mill," which certainly inclines to the " sloppy " and enervating. As already mentioned, the scenery of the story is partly that of the Brenner Pass in Tyrol and the Murgthal in Baden, visited by Stevenson as a boy of twelve.

His magazine-work continued with increasing encouragement from editors, though the public was still indifferent. Throughout the year the series of papers ultimately published as *Virginibus Puerisque* ran their course, partly in the *Cornhill*, partly in *London*, a weekly review founded and edited by Stevenson's old friend of college days, Robert Glasgow Brown. Two of the sketches, " Pan's Pipes " and " El Dorado," appeared in May under the editorship of Brown. In December that gentleman retired owing to ill health, and was succeeded by W. E. Henley. Stevenson then became a regular contributor with Grant Allen, Andrew Lang, and others then and since well known.

To Henley, Stevenson owed his introduction as a popular story-writer. " The New Arabian Nights " ran serially in *London* from June to October of that year (1878). The series owed much to the editorial suggestions of Henley, and still more to the wild, lurid invention of Bob Stevenson, the idea of the grim, ghastly " Suicide Club " being, I believe, wholly his. In serial form the series was an almost complete failure. Nor, as we shall see, did Stevenson ever really succeed in capturing the vast, heedless heterogeneous public which subsists (mentally) on the cream-tarts of literature ; that is, its serial stories. In the case of " The New Arabian Nights," the work, for all its brilliancy of execution, was too remote from ordinary experience, too wildly fantastic even for popular consumption.

Poe would have made it convincing by a myriad familiar, scarcely-perceptible touches of reality. But Stevenson had not Poe's superhuman gift of gravity in dealing with the bizarre and the impossible, and investing them with an air of almost common-place actuality.

Henley was probably the only editor in Britain with sufficient courage to print the stories, and he paid the price of his temerity ; for it appears certain they did much to shorten the troubled, chequered life of *London*. And when the series was complete, publishers were so shy it lay four years unpublished. Even to-day, though devotees are not lacking, *The New Arabian Nights* remains one of the least popular of its author's works.

But he was not disheartened, nor did his energies abate. To the *New Quarterly Magazine* for October he contributed " The Gospel According to Walt Whitman," now included in *Familiar Studies of Men and Books*. As we have seen, the article was long in hand. It cost Stevenson perhaps more pains than any other critical paper he wrote, and in its final form it is certainly one of his happiest, most effective efforts in appreciation. A public nurtured on the musk and lavender of Tennyson, and the facile sweetness of Longfellow, could see nothing in Whitman but an inchoate, amorphous egotist, swollen with vanity and wholly devoid of the instincts of a true artist. Stevenson shows him as a great natural force, a superb original genius grappling with elemental human nature and the fundamental principles of life. If the expositor and eulogist did not succeed in making his hero popular, at least he made him intelligible ; and many of us owe our first real appreciation of Whitman to Stevenson's illuminative study. At

the same time he was busy with *Picturesque Notes on Edinburgh*, which ran serially for six months—June to December—in the *Portfolio*, and was immediately published in bookform by Seeley & Co. through the good offices of P. G. Hamerton.

## Edinburgh

Since that slight and pleasant book was written Stevenson's native town has suffered some inevitable changes. As the saying goes, it has marched with the times, though perhaps neither so fast nor so far as some of its ardent citizens imagine. It has widened its boundaries so as to double its population. Leith and Portobello are now part of the modern city, and the municipal tentacles have stretched and grasped in other directions. The sedan-chair, which Stevenson's baby eyes must have beheld, has vanished save as a curious relic in museums of antiquities. Electric standards lift their heads brazenly in Princes Street, and electric cars give it an air of modernity and bustle. All day long motor-buses fare forth from the Mound, hard by the National Gallery, for a wide radius of towns, villages, and points of historic or scenic interest. The automobile and motor-cycle possess the streets, though " noddies," as horse-cabs were known, draw out a meagre, lingering existence around Waverley and Princes Street stations. To-morrow they may be gone. Sunday, so gloomy and terrible in Stevenson's youth, has been ameliorated almost out of recognition, has, in fact, been turned from a holy day to a holiday. In summer Queensferry, Cramond, Roslin, Colinton, Glencorse are clamorous with Sunday-trippers ;

and innumerable golf-courses are inconveniently crowded with Sunday golfers.

All that marks an immense change. Yet in essentials the old spirit survives. At heart Edinburgh is what it was. It still disputes hotly over religion, still consumes vast quantities of whisky, is still (in certain sections) pleasantly intellectual and bookish, still bears itself, as in Stevenson's day, with " conscious moral rectitude," and as the metropolis of Scotland is disposed to regard its neighbours and rivals with the eye of patronage.[1] Nor has the " eccentric appearance " on which Stevenson dwells altered. The hills, crags, chasms, Wynds, closes, and castle, all the picturesque details, remain as they were in his day.

The general aspect as you approach from the south, or more immediately from the east by the London train, is apt to be bleak even in summer, and in winter is sure to be dismal—a grey landscape, grey dykes, grey houses clambering in serried ridges to a grey sky. " Few places, if any," remarks Stevenson, " offer a more barbaric display of contrasts to the eye." Viewed from Princes Street—" the most picturesque street in Europe," according to the fond local fancy—the upward prospect, with its " cliffs of masonry," presents a " profusion of eccentricities " which suggest a convulsion of nature that first upheaved the buildings and then flung them together in haphazard yet amazingly romantic disarray. They may have been designed and grouped with some dim motive of poetic grace. At any rate, the

[1] " We [Edinburgh people] are a queer mixture of bigotry and paroxysmal gaiety with a great amount of what is called ' Godly hatred of each other.' "—John Brown, M.D., author of *Rob and His Friends*.

dizzy irregularities of outline are the pride of the inhabitants. Nowhere else on earth, they will tell you, can such a sight be seen ; and probably they are right. The houses, holding giddily to the face of the fundamental rock, clamber one above another to the ridge-crest, where at last they plant themselves like an army of invasion perilously establishing foothold. But if you care to climb to the crag-perched castle (as all visitors should), you will be gratified by one of the finest views in the kingdom. Northward you can see the Fife hills, with hazy glimpses and suggestions of other hills beyond. Southward, close by, is Blackford Hill ; behind it are the Braids, once beloved of Sir Walter Scott ; and farther off and slightly to the left the Pentlands, holding in their green folds Colinton and Swanston, now for ever haunted by the spirit of Robert Louis Stevenson.

The Old Town, the real Auld Reekie of song and legend, stretches down from the castle height to Holyrood, as Carlyle, with his matchless gift of description, pictures it—" A sloping high-street and many side-lanes, covering, like some wrought tissue of stone and mortar, like some rhinoceros-skin with many a gnarled embossment, church steeple, chimney-head and other ornament and indispensability, back and ribs of the slope." Included in that downward slope is " The Royal Mile," now the paradise of the local antiquary. The houses, for most part, are tall, gaunt, hungry-looking, and at close quarters often unspeakably squalid. Certain streets are so sunk that they seem mere built-in chasms, gullies of masonry cut sheer into the hill-side. Naturally they are both sunless and smoky. Almost within bowshot of Princes Street are huddled darkly some of the

most sordid slums in Britain or anywhere else. To peep into the hovels of Candlemaker Row and the purlieus of the Grassmarket is to have a lively realisation of what the lives of our ancestral cavemen must have been. Even Holyrood, the home of ancient Royalty, the fountain-head of Scottish romance, stands in a quarter of slums, smelling rankly of breweries and gasworks.

For the rest, Edinburgh is a city of handsome suburbs, of churches, schools, libraries, taverns, spires, and statues, these mostly commemorating celebrities whose names are strange to the visitor. Burns and Scott are honoured, the latter by what is probably the handsomest monument ever erected to a man of letters; but the honour to Stevenson lingers.

Its situation on "the slope and summit of three hills" exposes Edinburgh to all the violent fluctuations of Scottish weather. Hurricanes descend upon it suddenly. Squalls and whirlwinds, coming as suddenly from nowhere, scoop up its superabundant dust, filling the air with grit, and with ash as well as grit. For it is the pleasant mediæval custom of its inhabitants to set their uncovered, heaped-up ash-buckets in the open street for the wind or dustman, as chance may determine. The wind in that quarter, being an early riser, commonly arrives first, with this consequence, that the morning pedestrian makes his way through grey, scudding clouds that reek, as may be imagined, somewhat too thickly of the dustbin. In spring, cold, soggy, clinging mists, locally called "haars," come up from the sea, enveloping everything in a clammy vapour, as of soapsuds blown from fields of ice. Stevenson found the climate "one of the vilest under heaven," and was of opinion that "to none but those who have

themselves suffered the thing in the body can the gloom and depression of our Edinburgh winters be brought home." And, indeed, such an experience, abbreviated even to a single month, say January for choice, will sufficiently explain why he had to flee for his life.

In his book Stevenson touched lightly and not unkindly on the foibles and absurdities of his fellow-townsmen. Yet his geniality did not save him from censure and resentment. What was picturesque, romantic, or laudatory was right and proper, but what was critical or touched with satire, what let in light revealing the dark places of bigotry or intolerance, was furiously repudiated. Some outraged citizens even construed the book as an act of vindictiveness. Stevenson had been snubbed, slighted, ostracised; here was his revenge. The circumstance that the work happened to be written abroad turned suspicion to certainty. The author took refuge in France in order to disparage and libel the city of his birth, struck, so to speak, from the safety of distance. It is scarcely necessary to say that the charge is untrue and absurd. Yet the spirit of resentment lingers. There are still worthy people who resent *Picturesque Notes* as a subtly-calculated slander, just as there are still worthy people who regard the author as a mental and moral freak. *Nemo me impune lacessit.*

## Meeting with George Meredith

With the exception of ten or twelve days, Steven son was absent from Scotland for the whole of the year (1878). But he was several times in London and Cambridge with Henley, Leslie Stephen, and

Mr. Colvin. His parents, anxious and impatient to see him, chose Burford Bridge as a meeting-place, and there in March he joined them at the little inn, the Burford Arms, hard by the foot of Box Hill, a place destined to be for ever famous in the history of English literature. As usual, he carried his work with him, which just then happened to be the later of *The New Arabian Nights* series. The visit, casually planned as a matter of convenience, proved an event of outstanding interest and importance in the life of Stevenson. It chanced that a young couple, friends of George Meredith, Mr. and Mrs. J. E. H. Gordon, were then living at Pixholm, in that delightful neighbourhood. At the instigation, it is said, of an interested publisher, they sought out Louis Stevenson and introduced him to Meredith, one sunny afternoon in their garden. From afar he had long admired Meredith as one of the supreme masters of British fiction, one whose creations stand just a little lower than those of Shakespeare. Now he approached in the spirit of a disciple come to do homage.

Meredith, whom it was my privilege to know some years after Stevenson's death, was one of the most puissant, compelling personalities of his time. His own struggle to gain a place in literature had been long and bitter ; for the great British public is chary of originality, especially when couched in a style which makes no concessions to the popular vice of sleepy-mindedness. But neglect had neither soured nor depressed his robust, buoyant, even boyish temperament. To young authors who, in his judgment, showed real merit or promise he was extraordinarily sympathetic and encouraging, though he could be, and often was, piercing in criticism. To his prompt, generous appreciation I can

testify from personal experience. He read my early novel, *The Minister of State* (a title, by the way, taken from one of his own novels), and immediately wrote in terms which filled the young author with pride and gratitude. " Come and see me," he said ; and I went. I can still recall the thrill, half of awe, half of exultation, with which I approached Flint Cottage and climbed to the famous two-roomed chalet or summer-house at the top of his steep garden.

There, as all the world now knows, he produced some of his best work, both in fiction and poetry. There, too, he liked to receive and entertain his friends with such talk as could be heard nowhere else in England. I have known most of the brilliant talkers of my time, and Meredith was easily king of them all. For, in my judgment, he talked even better than he wrote. In writing his style is often so condensed, so charged with subtle, half-expressed or merely suggested meaning as to be cryptic to the general reader. The difficulty, the obscurity with which, like Browning, he has been charged arose from sheer excess of riches, the desire, as it were, to squeeze a gallon into a quart bottle. It is not a popular method. The British mind is conservative and methodic, and likes its gallons and its quarts in proper measure. But his talk had the ease, grace, flexibility, freedom, blitheness, and even more than the brilliancy of Congreve. I have seen him hold a company of men of letters, all critical and mostly cynical, hanging on his speech enchanted as children listening to fairy-tales. The range and variety of his talk were amazing ; more amazing still was its quality. But it was in the give and take of intimate conversation—the witty remark, the flashing

epigram, the winged repartee, the riotous, sometimes grotesque, humour, as of a Rabelais in his easy-chair, and above all the explosive Homeric laughter which often ended an argument, that he was most himself.

Intellectually, imaginatively, temperamentally, he was of the race of giants. It has been remarked by Carlyle that the voice is wonderfully physiognomic. It certainly was so with Meredith. In its compass, richness, and variety his voice seemed the ideal instrument for expressing his whole virile, vibrant personality. In appearance, too, he looked the genius he was. The noble head poised with a clear suggestion of high-bred pride; the fine, Shakespearean forehead, with its suggestions of creative power, overhung by an affluence of silvery hair; the shrewd grey eyes, keen and clear as an eagle's; the sensitive, delicately-moulded mouth, fit vehicle for beautiful or flaming speech—all combined to give an indefinable impression of genius. It was sometimes said he loved to hear himself talk. Certainly he dominated any company in which he happened to be, a contrast in that respect to some other men of genius, both past and present.

Stevenson was himself a voluble talker; but in the presence of Meredith, at any rate in the early days of acquaintance, he was subdued into silence, doubtless awed and charmed by that dominating intellect. Meredith loved a good listener, and Louis was immediately admitted to the inner circle of his friends. In later years he did not speak much of Stevenson, but when he did it was with admiration and affection. "A brave spirit" he said once in such a reference, with unwonted emotion—"a brave spirit." And then, remem-

bering Shelley, "A pard-like spirit—beautiful and swift." It was the man he admired, the indomitable fighter who had "won his wager and recovered his glove." With Stevenson the writer, the pretty essayist, the producer of popular romances, I do not think he was ever greatly impressed, at all events until *Weir of Hermiston* revealed the tragedy of unsuspected powers and unrealised ideals.

The memorable and delightful visit to Burford Bridge lasted some three weeks. At the end of that time Louis returned to France, leaving his parents to return to Edinburgh by themselves. A sharp recurrence of lung-trouble necessitated a hurried flight to southern France, but the attack was soon over; and for most of the summer he was in Paris acting as secretary to Fleeming Jenkin, who was serving as British Juror at the International Exposition of that year. With Jenkin in their later relations Stevenson was always happy. Almost better than any other of his friends, Jenkin knew how to bring out the best that was in him. Their duties as juror and secretary left them ample leisure for recreation. A favourite pastime was the theatre. They saw Salvini again, and were enchanted with Sarah Bernhardt, then only beginning to be known in England as the foremost actress of her age. In his *Memoir of Fleeming Jenkin* Stevenson gives several charming glimpses of their life together in Paris. One characteristic incident deserves to be cited. Having Welsh, that is to say, Celtic, blood in his veins, Jenkin easily gave way to emotion. At a performance of *The Marquis de Villemer*, that "blameless play, he had his fill of weeping; and when the piece was at an end, in front of a café in

the mild midnight air we had our fill of talk about the art of acting."

His jurorship ended, Jenkin returned to Scotland leaving his friend and secretary behind. Stevenson's position then was, if possible, more delicate and precarious than ever. Mrs. Osbourne was still in France, alternating uncertainly between Paris and Grez, but had decided to return in the early autumn to the United States with her son and daughter. To Stevenson her departure was as the challenge of Fate, daring him to put fortune, career, everything to the hazard. I have said that he not only wrote romance, but lived romance. He was living it then with an all-engrossing intensity and passion. In the old days he would have come gallantly clanking his bridle-rein, and the lady would have had but to smile assent to be up on the crupper and riding for dear love. His ancestress who had helped to found the family of Pilrig had so ridden and had prospered. But times were changed. The prosaic nineteenth century put a heavy premium on prudence. Moreover, the greater part of his £1,000 was gone, and for further supplies he was almost wholly dependent on his father, his own earnings being less than those of a common labourer. Mrs. Osbourne was not at all the woman to encourage headlong imprudence. Discretion was the better part of love as well as of valour. It was enough that they understood each other as they did very clearly. They could bide their time; in fact, they must bide till the law, with its wearisome red tape, made her a free woman. By that time funds might be more plentiful.

Accordingly Mrs. Osbourne left for California, and Stevenson turned to his interrupted work, fired

by a great new resolution ; the resolution to force the door of fortune, in other words, to make an independent income and make it speedily. " What a man truly wants, that he will get or he will be changed in trying," he wrote, thinking, as usual, of himself. The door of fortune seemed very securely bolted against him ; but he was neither dismayed nor dispirited. When Mrs. Osbourne left he retired to Monastier, among the hills above the Loire, and there, by three weeks of intense, concentrated toil, finished *The New Arabian Nights* and other work he had on hand. By the beginning of September he was " a free man," but freedom was now irksome. He could not rest. It was little enough in his nature to rest at any time. The blessed gift of inertia which conserves brain and nerve and almost makes sloth a virtue was never his, save in moments of overpowering lassitude and by compulsion. Just then, with his thoughts in a turmoil, his heart torn between love and duty, his natural restlessness was not likely to be diminished.

He had no fresh work planned ; but he must do something, find some distraction. In that mood he bought a donkey, the little " mouse-coloured " creature, scarcely bigger than " a Newfoundland dog," which he called Modestine. The price was " sixty-five francs and a glass of brandy," a transaction that seems to transport us back to the golden age. On September 22 he started on the solitary journey through the Cevennes, which he described with Sterne-like charm in *Travels with a Donkey*. The trip lasted eleven days and furnished Stevenson with some delightful " copy." Heart and mind. however, were far away from Modestine and the Cevennes. The lover waiting in a torment of bliss and doubt was at least as much alive as the tourist

sedulously taking notes. The intimate parts of the book—and there are many of them—were addressed not to potential readers among the public, but to " F." In one of his bewitching prefaces Hawthorne confesses that he always wrote for one particular reader—the reader who understands and appreciates without explanation. In *Travels with a Donkey* there was many a cipher message to Fanny Van de Grift Osbourne. She would read between the lines and understand, not without deep throbs of emotion, " how the world gives and takes away, and brings sweethearts near only to separate them into distant and strange lands : but to love is the great amulet which makes the world a garden ; and hope, ' which comes to all,' outwears the accidents of life and reaches with tremulous hand beyond the grave and death. Easy to say : yes, but, by God's mercy, both easy and grateful to believe." Such is a sample of the love-letters deftly incorporated in the text of *Travels with a Donkey*.

From Monastier he went to visit P. G. Hamerton, editor of the *Portfolio*, who was then living quietly near Autun. Hamerton was a good friend and a candid critic ; but he knew how to give his " cuts and cuffs " in private, and bestow " his kisses " *coram publico*. From Autun Stevenson went on to Paris ; but the old attraction was gone, and he crossed immediately to England. For some days he occupied the rooms of Professor Colvin in Trinity College, Cambridge, without imbibing any taste for English University life. Solitary and at sea, he was too stupid to work. Everything was unreal. The " gyp " who waited on him reminded him of some fantastic survival of the past ; the bedmaker was " a kind of cheerful, innocent nightmare." Apparently no one told him that youth and beauty

would be a disqualification for the Cambridge bed-makers. Going up to London, he passed much of his time at the Savile Club, and with Henley at Acton and Ealing in the western suburbs.

In the early winter he returned to Scotland. All Edinburgh was talking excitedly of *Picturesque Notes*, and for the most part in a tone of offended dignity. Only a few, more liberal-minded than their neighbours, acknowledged the truth and justice of the picture. He paid little heed to the clamour of abuse, though he was gratified by the occasional note of praise. Throughout the winter he was close at work on *Travels with a Donkey* and carefully working in the " protestations to F." which, as we have seen, are strewn throughout the book. Early next spring—that is, the spring of 1879—it was in the printer's hands, and in June it was published by the firm which had brought out *An Inland Voyage*. Again the edition was small, and again part of it was " remaindered." The little coterie of friends and partisans was enthusiastic in its praise, but the critics were still indifferent or contemptuous. One superior person spoke of it as *Travels* of *a Donkey*, and there were those who referred meaningly to Coleridge's " Ode to an Ass " and Byron's cruel citation of " a fellow feeling makes us wondrous kind." The discerning, however, found the little book a striking advance on *An Inland Voyage* both in matter and in manner. Stevenson himself noted a few chapters which, he thought, had " some stuff in them in the way of writing," particularly " A Camp in the Dark " and " A Night among the Pines." The latter incorporates material originally intended to stand as a preface, and no doubt appears more properly where it

is. To-day the work so disdainfully received is one of the most popular travel books of its generation.

Having written his account of the Cevennes trip, and, as it were, underlined the messages to " F." he fell for a short time into a state of feverish discontent, a state which led to months of nomadic wandering, and finally to a crisis which seemed to be charged with all the elements of disaster. Despite the companionship of such close friends as Charles Baxter and Fleeming Jenkin, he was finding Edinburgh more and more uncongenial. He had enjoyed summer skies and a summer atmosphere elsewhere. Besides, in the nature of things happiness at home was, for the present at least, impossible. He had secret longings, purposes which he dared not divulge. To impart them would be to inflict pain and precipitate a catastrophe. Moreover, the great secret he was guarding was another's as well as his own. He could not, therefore, take his parents into his confidence. Merely to hint that he was in love with another man's wife would have been to outrage all the cherished feelings and traditions of 17 Heriot Row; to say that he was bent on marrying her would have been the last straw in domestic tragedy. However dear, however honourable, such a course of action might in the circumstances appear to himself, it would be impossible to convince his father and mother that it could be anything but indefensibly, cruelly wrong. They simply could not understand. Therefore, save for casual references to an American lady art-student he had met in France, he held his peace.

In judging Stevenson at that crucial turn of his life, it is essential to bear in mind the mental,

moral, and religious idiosyncrasies of his own people, the atmosphere they breathed, the traditions they inherited and held, the faith, the convictions they shared with those about them. Earlier in this work I tried to give some conception of the peculiar psychology of Edinburgh in the days of Stevenson's youth, because I felt that such a conception, constantly borne in mind, is necessary for a true understanding of his character and the conditions of his life. To-day it is at once easy and unjust to call Thomas Stevenson and his wife bigoted sectarians, with a narrow outlook and biased illiberal opinions. They were part and parcel of the life, social and religious, of their time and place. They were Covenanters and Calvinists to the marrow. To them the Bible and the Shorter Catechism were incontrovertible realities, clear revelations of God's will and the doctrines of inspired men. Therefore it would appear to them that Louis was simply flying in the face of Providence, wantonly throwing away his own soul. On his part, he had to choose between filial loyalty and the claims of love. He could not honour both, and he chose, as always, with relentless decision.

It may be thought, however, that the secrets he kept as under iron lids seared and burned ; and there were other circumstances to try and also to wound affection. He was at last beginning to succeed in the calling he had chosen and pursued in face of so much opposition ; his father was relenting ; his mother was openly proud. Both doted on him ; and what return was he to make for all their lavished affection ? To practise a deception, that must have torn his heart. The situation became intolerable, and to escape from it he hurried off to London. There for some time

he collaborated with Henley in working over the rough draft of the play *Deacon Brodie*, made some ten years before. He worked mostly at the Savile Club, where, to the annoyance of the attendants, he often appeared in the morning clamouring to get in before the doors were open.

Again, too, the old Bohemian instincts became active and urgent. Dropped incidentally into *An Amateur Emigrant* are some experiences and adventures of that time, when stealing out alone at night he sought first-hand knowledge of the seething underworld of London. Long afterwards I heard tales of his escapades in the West End from men who claimed to know his modes of life just then, that seemed to indicate he was not out in quest of respectability nor to " honour the Ten Commandments." One of his diversions was to prowl round like a would-be bandit or burglar, clad in an old sleeved waistcoat, black flannel shirt, and a weird headgear that was the mere remnant of a hat. In his charming volume of Reminiscences Sir Sidney Colvin tells how then, or during an earlier visit, Stevenson appeared one morning at his cottage in Norwood " weary and dirty after a night's walking followed by a couple of hours' slumber in a garden outhouse he found open." His ingenious plan was to extend his knowledge of vagabond life by getting himself arrested. But the London police interpret their duties with a large common sense, and they merely laughed at the queer creature who accosted them with a request to be " run in." Had they taken him anywhere, it would probably have been to an institution for the mentally afflicted. He was clever, but not clever enough to pass as a London rogue and vagabond. Occasionally his unconventional ways

and appearances embarrassed his friends. Thus one day, clad in smoking-cap and the brigand cloak which had caused a sensation at Mentone, he met Andrew Lang walking with someone in Bond Street. Stevenson was jovially cordial, but Lang waved him off. "No, no," he said; "my character will stand a great deal, but it won't stand being seen talking to a thing like you in Bond Street." These diversions were varied by a walking-trip in the Stour Valley, but a blistered heel brought it to an abrupt end, and he returned to the companionship of Henley.

## Moving to a Crisis

Not to rest, or even to work, however; for the wander-fever was upon him. There followed a time of breathless running to and fro from London to Scotland, from Scotland to London. In March, Henley spent a few days with him at Swanston, where they finished the play *Deacon Brodie*. Almost immediately he was back in London, but only to return abruptly to Swanston, where he occupied himself in writing *Lay Morals* in secret and as if ashamed, Henley thought. About that time, too, and in a fit of high morality, he wrote his much-discussed essay, "Some Aspects of Robert Burns," which appeared later in the *Cornhill*. He was himself greatly delighted with it, thought it his "high-water mark," and so forth. Critically it is a poor, as ethically it is rather a dishonest, performance, unworthy alike of its subject and its author. Beside Carlyle's epoch-making essay (which Stevenson knew and admired rapturously) it is the essay of a pert schoolboy striving to please the school

chaplain; beside Henley's masterly study of the poet it is almost ludicrously jejune. Even in comparison with the essays of Jeffrey and Wilson it is thin and anæmic. To-day it gives the impression of having been written in a spasm of morality by one trying to appease a troublesome conscience.

Later he owned that it was perhaps not becoming in a man of his calibre to sit so severely in judgment on Burns. Certainly there is something comically ironical in the spectacle of the Stevenson of that period delivering sermons on the amatory irregularities of Robert Burns. One easily imagines how the author of "Holy Willie's Prayer" might and could have retorted.

"You among the Pharisees?" he might laugh satirically—"you? *Que diable allait-il faire dans cette galère?* Don Juan, libertine indeed. Fine names from your lips. If I dearly lo'ed the lasses (as I did to my cost), are you shy of them? Robin, we're birds of a feather there, old hawks, both of us. Why, then, slash my back at such a pitch?" The question is highly pertinent. Are we to suppose that under pressure of an officious conscience the Shorter Catechist was disingenuously disavowing the "lover and sensualist" remarked by Henley, that in a spasm of respectability Philip sober was disowning Philip drunk, or had the deadly duel between Jekyll and Hyde begun? In any case, the position was rich in piquant material for the satirist.

Was Stevenson for once guilty of the hypocrisy he was ever ready to condemn as an unpardonable vice in others? On the facts it must be admitted he makes an equivocal appearance both as a man and a moralist, if, indeed, the moralist be not thrust out of court. For, in the very moment when he

was condemning the loose morals of Burns, he was himself in the midst of similar complications, similar Don Juanisms. Generally it is assumed that his romance with Mrs. Osbourne engaged his whole heart and attention. A few intimates, including Henley and Charles Baxter, were well aware that such was not the case, that concurrently with his love-affair in France he had at least two other affairs in his native town. One of these, and the chief, covered the years 1876–9, the period, as has been supposed, of his undivided allegiance to Mrs. Osbourne; and, though much interrupted by absences, appears to have been of a passionate, as it certainly was of a serious, nature. The woman concerned, Margaret Stevenson, was the daughter of a builder and carpenter of Aberdeen, and during her acquaintance with Stevenson was employed in Edinburgh. The other woman was a native of a Midlothian village, and, I understand, stood on a somewhat lower social level. Both are reported to have been good-looking—the first slender and dark, the second tall, fair, and remarkably well built,[1] so that their lover is at least to be credited with the elements of good taste. The two knew each other, or at any rate met. One meeting took place near Swanston Cottage while Stevenson was there with his parents; and there was, I am informed, a scene of fury resulting in physical violence. What Thomas Stevenson and his wife thought of the "fight" and all it signified may be imagined. Stevenson states explicitly that he could see no harm in love for women, and that the only real vices are hypocrisy and cruelty. Was he judging himself;

[1] She was, I am informed, the daughter of a blacksmith. Mr. Hellman, to whose searches we owe so much, appears to confuse her with the "Claire" of an earlier date.

or could he have several love-affairs simultaneously without hypocrisy and cruelty? Perhaps the best comment is furnished by words which he wrote himself of Burns: "It is the punishment of Don Juanism to create continually false relations, relations in life which are wrong in themselves, and which it is equally wrong to break or perpetuate. This was such a case."

It may be added that for the lessons pointed by the lapses of Burns his countrymen north of the Tweed were the reverse of grateful. There was an instant and angry outcry of which the echoes still resound. When, after his death, it was proposed to erect a memorial to Stevenson, the project was vehemently denounced because he had slandered Burns. The peccant essay, it was further declared, was a piece of mean vindictiveness, instigated by the fact that Burns had satirised its author's maternal ancestor, the Ayrshire minister of "the accent fine" and "the cauld harangues"—to such excess does purblind prejudice run.

Meanwhile Stevenson continued or resumed his restless, breathless rushing from place to place. In April he was at Shandon Hydropathic, Gareloch, with his parents, where he discovered he did not at all enjoy their company. May found him with Meredith at Box Hill. Thence he returned to London, only to leave it immediately and cross to France. But neither Paris nor Grez was now tolerable, and he went on to Cernay la Ville. In June he was back in London applying unsuccessfully for employment on *The Times*.[1] From London he passed to Edinburgh and then to Swanston, where

[1] It is of some interest to recall that the manager with whom Stevenson then negotiated was Macdonald who later figured so conspicuously in the trial Parnell *v.* *The Times*.

he spent several weeks in a state of suppressed nervous tension. A crisis was at hand and he knew it, though he did his best to dissemble the knowledge.

From California came news that both heartened and dismayed. Mrs. Osbourne had instituted proceedings for divorce, but owing to the strain and excitement fell gravely ill. Stevenson was on the rack. It sharpened his torments that in Edinburgh he had no counsellor, no confidant, save Charles Baxter, to whom he could unburden his heart, if, indeed, he desired to unburden it to anyone. Baxter held no rigid puritanical creed; but he was a lawyer, and would naturally bring the caution and logic of the legal mind to bear on the situation. Caution and logic were not what Stevenson wanted, at least in regard to the course he meant to pursue. In other respects his caution, his circumspection, may well appear callous. His parents knew nothing of his intentions, yet under their very eyes he was preparing to take the most momentous step in his whole life.

Outwardly all seemed to flow on as usual. He wrote letters playful and whimsical, into which crept just a random suggestion of sadness, of anxiety. But nothing could alter his decision. Here we get a clear glimpse of the flint that was in Robert Louis Stevenson. Months, many months before he had decided what in certain contingencies he would do; the occasion had come, and he had no idea of turning aside from his purpose. On the last day of July he left Edinburgh hurriedly for London, without giving any hint of what his going meant. He may have lacked courage to tell his parents, though that is not likely. He may have shrunk from the spectacle of consternation and pain, thinking they

could bear the shock of discovery best alone, or, as is perhaps more probable, he may merely have wished to avoid a scene.

Whatever his motive he went, leaving his father and mother in ignorance of his real intention. When he took train at the Waverley Station, Edinburgh, he was, in fact, starting for California. with the ticket for New York in his pocket.[1] In London the friends to whom he disclosed his purpose did their utmost to dissuade him from a course that seemed to them not merely foolish and foolhardy, but patently suicidal. They might as well have argued with a hurricane. It was never his way to allow himself to be turned aside from any design he had deliberately formed ; least of all was he likely to be diverted when heart and feelings were so deeply engaged. He laughed counsels of prudence to scorn. Prudence ! Fine word " prudence " as a pretext for cowards to be cowardly. The brave man has other things to consider than a shrinking, skulking, cloistered prudence.

> He either fears his fate too much,
> Or his desert is small
> Who dares not put it to the touch
> To win or lose it all.

Whatever happened, whoever suffered, he was going to Fanny Van de Grift Osbourne.

It was a strange adventure for the son of Thomas Stevenson, stranger still for the grandson of the Rev. Lewis Balfour ; yet not so strange for the descendant of John Blair and the " French

[1] Purchased from J. P. Oliver, Hanover Street, Edinburgh, agent for the Anchor Line Steamship Company.

*émigré*." "Alien bloods," says Oliver Wendell Holmes, in one of his illuminative medical asides—"alien bloods develop strange currents when they flow to each other." The truth of the aphorism was perhaps never more strikingly exemplified than in Robert Louis Stevenson.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE GREAT ADVENTURE

"A MAN is of no use until he has dared everything," Stevenson declared, as if pricking his courage for the great adventure on which he was now bent, the most daring, the most momentous, even in his adventurous life. He needed all the intrepidity and fortitude at his command. For he knew that in literal truth he was hazarding everything—career, fortune, character, the help and affection of his family, the fidelity of his friends, all that the future held of hope or potential happiness. Even existence itself was staked; for the gallant effort to achieve an independent income had failed and he was almost penniless.

Yet he never hesitated, never for an instant dreamed of abandoning his project. And let it be remembered he was not acting on the rush of a sudden, heady impulse, such as in a moment of heat and impetuosity might carry him off his feet and blind him to consequences. His action was the cool, resolute carrying-out of a purpose deliberately formed and long cherished. Assuredly there was flint in Robert Louis Stevenson, tempered, as may well appear, by a large admixture of selfishness. Quite clearly, at that juncture he thought much of his own desires and little enough of the pain of others.

In London he spent but a few days, making what meagre preparations he could afford for his journey, and incidentally repelling and beating down all counsels of prudence from his friends. On Tuesday, August 5, Henley saw him off at St. Pancras station, and he travelled by the Midland route to Glasgow. Thence on the 7th he sailed for New York by the *Devonia*, belonging to the Anchor Line, a comparatively new ship of 4,270 tons. She carried first-class, intermediate, and steerage passengers. The steerage rate was £6 6*s*., passengers providing their own bedding and mess-utensils. The intermediate rate was £8 8*s*., with somewhat better accommodation, and bedding and utensils provided. Stevenson sailed intermediate.

From Greenock he wrote to Mr. Colvin, enclosing a note to be forwarded to his father. The letter, which is not included in the published correspondence, indicates a sharp and swift reaction from the glow and determination of the Edinburgh departure. There was no compunction, no remorse—he was little given to either—only a stupor of insensibility, a torpor of feeling as if the self-precipitated crisis had overwhelmed his whole being. "I seem to have died last night," was his pathetic confession. Such was his numbness of heart and spirit that he was without "a regret, a hope, a fear, or an inclination"; and he signed himself as "the husk that once contained R. L. S." Those who picture Stevenson with a sempiternal grin of gaiety or levity may profitably ponder these words.

It may be presumed he was not without thoughts of 17 Heriot Row, and the tumult, both of anger and of anguish, the news of his adventure would cause there. As the *Devonia* steamed down the Firth of Clyde, familiar to him in happier days, his

eyes must have turned wistfully eastward to the home which could no longer be home to him. For well he knew what his conduct must and would mean. Thomas Stevenson had endured much, forgiven much ; but this crowning outrage was beyond the limits of paternal forgiveness. The son who had already caused so much sorrow and distress, for whom again and again he had strained generosity till it seemed mere maudlin weakness, was showing his gratitude by flouting every dictate of duty, every sentiment of filial affection. Worse still, he was wantonly dragging the family honour in the mire, was, in fact, guilty of treason where treason appeared basest and most cruel. There could be no more of it. Let the ingrate go. Such, Stevenson knew, must be the stern judgment at 17 Heriot Row.

Quite clearly he realised that the die was cast, that, by an act which would be construed as something worse than insanity, he had forfeited all claims and rights as the son of his father ; and the realisation was so bitter that for a little he lost heart. Perhaps never before or after did he feel so utterly desolate and forlorn as when he stood on the deck of the *Devonia* on that Thursday night, the 7th of August 1879, and watched the lights of Greenock sink out of sight behind. All his buoyancy, all his airiness, all his pride, defiance and resolution could not bear up against the awful sense of loss and isolation. And, indeed, to no man who ever saw the lights of home fade and disappear in darkness could the future, into which he was plunging without chart or compass, have seemed blacker. Nor was the blackness imaginary, for, as we shall see presently, what was to come actually surpassed even his worst fears and forebodings.

Physically the inevitable happened. As if to aggravate his depression, his health took a sudden downward curve. Yet to his peculiar temperament the very precariousness of health and fortune may well have proved a stimulus. If he were doomed to failure and early death, if he felt life and love and opportunity slipping from his grasp as sand slips through an hour-glass, then all the greater reason for making one last determined effort to seize the desire of his heart, to snatch, as it were, a momentary warmth and brightness before the lights went out for ever. A man fighting with his back to the wall performs miracles of valour and hardihood of which in ordinary moods he is utterly incapable. At any rate, out of the chaos of conflicting emotions, the depression, the apathy, the momentary self-distrust, one clear, imperious motive reasserted itself. Out yonder, far beyond the darkness, a woman was waiting, praying that the good ship *Devonia* would make all speed. Her call was in his ears, and it brought back all his courage, his decision and fortitude. Had Stevenson drawn himself then, as later he drew Alan Breck or the Master of Ballantrae, we should have the spectacle of a character grievously at odds with fate, dubiously struggling with duty, yet ever relentlessly pursuing its own purposes, and in the end triumphantly carrying off all the stage honours.

By the time the *Devonia* had reached Moville and taken Irish passengers off the tender from Londonderry, he had recovered something of his old spring and blitheness. At three in the afternoon the *Devonia* was under full steam in a rough sea. Westward-bound steamers putting out from Moville pass, as it were at a step, from the lakelike smoothness of Lough Foyle into the racing, white-

crested billows of the Atlantic, which even a moderate wind sends rolling furiously upon the Donegal headlands, to break and boil in leagues of surf. Stevenson, who loved the sea and enjoyed its tossings, was soon in his element. He " chummed " heartily with his fellow-passengers, cheering sadness, making light of discomforts, and ever, with an eye to the main chance, studying human nature in the raw. He pretended to be an emigrant, but a discerning Welsh blacksmith detected him as a masquerader, though with an admission that the neophyte did " pretty well "— a lukewarm compliment which appears to have pricked the sensitive vanity of Stevenson.

All the while he was assiduously writing, for only death itself could stay or divert the ruling passion. At a table set in a corner he worked amid incessant and distracting noises ; sometimes, too, holding on dizzily as the ship pitched and tossed. In this manner he wrote " The Story of a Lie " (a significant title just then), which appeared in the *New Quarterly Magazine* for October. It is one of the least successful of his short stories ; but considering the conditions, physical and mental, in which it was written, it almost deserves to be called a masterpiece. As a determined effort in comedy, it illustrates more pertinently than any specific declaration could, with what ardour, what intensity of endeavour, Stevenson was trying to maintain his spirits, and, if possible, justify himself to himself. At the same time he made copious notes which were afterwards used in *The Amateur Emigrant*.

Late on the night of the 17th or early morning of the 18th the *Devonia* reached Castle Garden, New York ; and Stevenson landed, one of a motley

throng, in a drenching, dismal rain. From the health point of view the emigrant-experience was a disastrous failure. "Bad food, bad air, and hard work," plus worry and anxiety of mind, reduced him to a pitiable plight. But, if disappointed, he vowed he was not beaten. On the contrary, by some stretch of an elastic fancy, he was able to report himself in good spirits. Under the guidance of his patron the Welsh blacksmith he went to a cheap boarding-house near the docks, the Reunion House, No. 10 West Street, kept by a kindly, genial Irishman named Michael Mitchell. There up dark stairs, in a bare room just big enough to hold a narrow bed and a chair, he passed the night wretchedly. On the floor of the kitchen behind the bar-room he left his sodden clothes "in a pulp in the middle of a pool." Lying sleepless, amid a din of voices and a clatter of heavy feet, the harassed, self-exiled Stevenson must have had strange thoughts of cosy suppers and happy faces and clean, wide beds in airy rooms in Edinburgh. The knight-errant pays for his errantry, and Stevenson was beginning, only beginning, to pay exorbitantly for his. Yet even then there were gleams of joy. In the Reunion House an Irish waitress read his own copy of *Travels with a Donkey* aloud to her sister, and he watched them. When they chuckled he felt flattered; when they yawned he affected indifference. "Such a wisely-conceived thing is vanity."

Next day he spent in making a dreary round of editorial offices, dismally trying to impress editors and induce them to buy manuscripts or give commissions. But though he was the author of three books and many short stories, much lauded

by the elect, his reputation had not reached America, at any rate as a paying editorial investment. Editors were polite—politeness is a tradition in American editorial offices—but they were also unanimous in declining what he had to offer. Later they were to have the distinction of "discovering" him, and, as it were, presenting him to his own countrymen as a writer of indubitable charm and freshness; but just then he seemed one of the nameless crowd who besiege magazines and newspapers with impossible proposals. Doubtless, too, appearances were against him. It is hard to recognise genius in the guise of a tramp, and eleven days of discomforts at sea had somewhat over-emphasised his customary Bohemianism of attire.

The picture of Robert Louis Stevenson trudging the streets of New York in a puddling, soaking rain like a pedlar, hawking wares which nobody would buy, is strange now, almost to the point of incredibility. To him then it was a grim enough reality, and must have brought thoughts the reverse of exhilarating. He may well have envied his fellow-immigrants of the *Devonia*. If they were poor, and poverty was their incentive in emigrating, if, like himself, they presented a wretched appearance, they were at least spared his desolate sense of rejection. Hope burned high in them; for they came to carve a fortune in a land of teeming riches. To him the land of teeming riches presented nothing but shut doors. Amid its plenty he might apparently starve and die unnoticed. And in the end he came perilously near starvation and death.

## A Contrast

The contrast in the experiences of another British author inevitably occurs to one's mind. When Dickens paid his first famous visit to America in 1842 he was thirty years of age ; at the date we have now reached Stevenson was twenty-nine, and had been writing sedulously ever since he could guide a pen. When Dickens landed, even before he landed, reporters and editors swarmed about him, jostling for the honour of shaking his hand, eager to do him service, eagerer still to describe and advertise him. No reporter or editor greeted Stevenson or evinced any knowledge of his existence. Dickens's passage from city to city was a triumphal progression, with levees, dinners, balls, deputations, serenadings, rejoicings, and torrents of flattery.

Writing in advance, Mr. Ticknor, a publisher, predicted "a progress through the States unequalled since Lafayette's," and the reality surpassed the prediction. From Boston, Dickens himself wrote to John Forster ; "How can I give you the faintest notion of my reception here ; of the crowds that pass in and out the whole day ; of the people that line the streets when I go out ; of the cheering when I went to the theatre ; of the copies of verses, letters of congratulation, welcomes of all kinds, balls, dinners, assemblies without end." New York outshone Boston in the splendour and sumptuousness of its welcome. For Stevenson there were no garlands, no festivities, no congratulatory verses or letters, no flattering speeches about inimitable genius. If Dickens represented the zenith of popularity, Stevenson certainly represented the very nadir.

Next day, about five o'clock in the afternoon, fourteen days after parting with Henley at St. Pancras, without a friend to wish him godspeed, with nothing to sustain him but his own inflexible courage, and Bancroft's *History of the United States* for solace and company, he crossed to Jersey City, to take the emigrant-train that was to carry him across the American continent to San Francisco and Mrs. Osbourne. Perhaps no lover ever adventured into the unknown in a sorrier condition. It was a question whether he could live to complete the journey, for to onlookers he seemed a tottering wreck.

A considerable part of the route he travelled is familiar to myself. To-day the express on the Pennsylvania and Reading Railroad between New York and Chicago, a distance of one thousand miles, is one of the most luxurious trains on the American continent, or anywhere else. But an emigrant train is not yet a *train de luxe*, and in 1879 it was many grades lower in comfort than it is now. To the young and strong, ardent for adventure, thirsting for new worlds to conquer, it holds all the elements of romance. To the half-dead Stevenson the journey was eleven days of concentrated misery. " What it is to be ill on an emigrant-train let those declare who know," he told Henley. More than once he was on the point of collapse. His appetite was gone ; to get sleep he was obliged to resort to laudanum. With the callousness of rude bodily health, some of his fellow-travellers laughed openly at the queer invalid and his grotesque appearance, in unbuttoned shirt, trousers and headgear that might once have been a hat. When he dined, or pretended to dine, he put on a coat as a concession to respectability. Sometimes he amused children

in the cars ; sometimes, to escape foul odours, he rode on the top, an American expedient unknown in Britain, or in the conductor's " caboose."

The scenery, as the crawling train passed west through Nebraska, offended and depressed him—sage-brush, alkali, bleached rocks, an endless tawny desert without colour or charm. At a wayside station he heard a cock crowing in the dawn, and the familiar sound, coming thus in a strange, dreary land, affected him to tears.

> He brings to me dear voices of the past,
> The old land and the years :
> My father calls for me.
> My weeping spirit hears.

It was his father that called, a significant touch which shows how his thoughts of home were running.

His hold on life was so exiguous he fancied it would be easy to commit suicide, because there was so little of him left. About his course of action he had neither doubt nor scruple. He felt he was doing right, though it would be impossible to convince others of his perfect rectitude and honour. They might cavil and criticise ; he did not care. His self-approval was sufficient.

On Saturday, August 30, twenty-three days after leaving the Clyde, he reached San Francisco, a pitiable wreck, ready for the hospital, ready almost for the undertaker. He was so weak he could scarcely stand alone ; emaciated to such a degree of tenuity, it seemed that, but for the clothes he wore, he must be transparent. Yet the inextinguishable spark which was the spirit of Robert Louis Stevenson burned bravely, if with a subdued and flickering brightness. He was accounted an arrant fool,

wantonly pursuing folly to his own ruin. Had his cause been different, had it by any chance chimed with popular taste or popular prejudice, he would have been acclaimed a hero; and if fortitude, tenacity, and invincible courage make the hero, then assuredly he was heroic. It might seem that, like Mirabeau, he had struck " that blockhead word —impossible " from his vocabulary, and was challenging Fate herself. The ordeal of travel was not yet ended. Mrs. Osbourne was living at Monterey, a hundred and fifty miles south, and thither he must go if he could crawl. With a last desperate effort he completed the journey. The lover who had come so far, dared and suffered so much, arrived physically a spectre, but mentally and emotionally jubilant. For Mrs. Osbourne's health was vastly improved, and divorce proceedings were going satisfactorily, if slowly.

Then, in his own phrase, came a piece of " outrageous bravery." Contemning the voice of reason, as he so often did, disdaining to seek medical advice, he procured a horse and rode out eighteen miles from Monterey among the Santa Lucia mountains of the coast range, to camp by himself. Fortunately, as it happened, he pitched his tent at a spot which was part of an Angora-goat ranch. But for that lucky choice the foolhardy venture would almost certainly have cost him his life. For a day or two he was able to move about languidly, with just strength enough to fetch water for himself and his horse, light a fire and make coffee. Then he collapsed. For two nights he lay under a tree " in a sort of stupor," not caring what befell him. In what was practically a dying condition he was discovered and rescued by two ranchmen on their rounds—one an old bear-

hunter and ex-captain of the Mexican War. Frontiersmen, as I can testify from experience, have hearts of gold under their rough, often fierce exteriors. Captain Smith and his assistant deserve commemoration for having saved Stevenson to literature and the world. Had they not found and succoured him, it is certain he must have died in that mountain solitude, unaided and alone. The moralist would have another text ; and literature would be the poorer by the loss of all the best work which stands to Stevenson's credit.

Pronouncing him " real sick," the Samaritans carried him to the ranch-house ; and there Captain Smith nursed him tenderly, if uncouthly, as he hung uncertainly between life and death. He had the will to live, a will which then, as always, made him amazingly tenacious of life ; and in that crisis rose in a " divine frenzy " against the weakness of the " vile body." As he recovered strength he passed the time in teaching his benefactor's children, their mother happening to be away ill. In this manner he passed a fortnight. At the end of that time he was allowed to ride back to Monterey with cautions as to future behaviour in such contingencies.

## A Demi-paradise

Fortunately he found excellent quarters with Dr. Heintz, a Frenchman by birth, and his wife, who installed him in a big, airy room " with five windows opening on to a balcony," as he told Henley. In the morning he had coffee and roll, French fashion, and dined at the restaurant of Jules Simoneau, a jolly, large-hearted, unfortunate

Frenchman, who had once been a prosperous tradesman; but now, owing to a too-convivial nature, was steadily descending in the social scale. To Jules and his Spanish-American wife, Dona Martina, Stevenson was indebted for much kindness and congenial friendship. With the lady "Don Roberto Louis" was soon a prime favourite (as Sam Bough remarked, he had a way with him), and she was assiduous in doing him little services. With her jovial husband and Stevenson it was Tam o' Shanter and Soutar Johnny over again. "A most pleasant old boy," is Stevenson's description of this new and strange friend, "with whom I discuss the universe and play chess." Other boon companions were Adolpho Sanchez, keeper of the Sanchez Saloon, and Bronson, editor, printer, and publisher of the small local newspaper, the *Monterey Californian*. In such an environment of restaurant, saloon, and printer's ink the novelist studied with avidity the queer, quaint mixture of Mexican and Indian population as it drifted, with true vagabond ease and freedom, to and fro between camp and ranch, clad in buckskin and somberro, and usually bristling with knives and revolvers.

He has himself left picturesque accounts of his experiences and observations. But the real atmosphere of Monterey and similar places as they then existed, with their adobe walls, their crazy wooden side-walks, their saloons and eating-houses, their incongruous population, their romance and their recklessness, is conveyed inimitably by Bret Harte, the real laureate of the Pacific coast. In a vein between jest and earnest Stevenson tells that, although he dined at the Simoneau restaurant, he "sponged" most of his other meals. But though

finances were grievously low, the confession is not to be taken too literally.

Mrs. Osbourne was living near-by with her family, behind adobe walls, in the house of a Spanish-American lady, with a garden that was a demi-paradise of flowers and foliage. Stevenson was a daily visitor, and the " sponged " meals were the fond, ever-ready hospitality of the woman for whose sake he had dared everything and crossed half a world. He had called the Edinburgh climate " one of the vilest under heaven." Now he enjoyed one of the most enchanting and animating, with an air that was balm to his lungs and elixir to his blood. In the garden of Dona Nachiti, Mrs. Osbourne's landlady, he found it an ineffable delight to sit and stroll and renew the sweet gallantries of Grez. Sometimes in the evening the whole family went off to the Simoneau restaurant, and there, under the auspices of Jules and Dona Martina, did their best to imagine themselves back in Paris. Occasionally, as Stevenson's strength increased, the party climbed the wooded heights behind Monterey, whence they had wide views and could hear the seas " breaking over ten or twelve miles of coast." To Stevenson the ceaseless surge and thunder of the surf was like solemn music, soothing his mind while lifting it to raptures of devotion. British readers who visited Niagara, in the days before it was set like a Samson to grind in the Philistine's mill, and lay at night listening to its mighty monotone, may have experienced something of the same high emotion.

Sometimes the excursions extended to Monterey Bay, one of the most beautiful on the whole Pacific coast, with its curving shore and its miles of white beaten sand. There he loved to watch " the tiny

sandpipers and the huge Pacific seas." When, as sometimes happened, such expeditions were made at night, the scene under the large Californian stars impressed him profoundly, as it must impress every imaginative beholder, with a mystical haunting sense of nature's vast power and permanency and man's littleness and transiency. For ages untold that surf had rolled and boomed in billows of foam under those serene stars ; and surf and stars would still be there when he and the puny generation of men should all be gone.

### Fruitless Efforts

There was much to bring happiness, yet his trouble and anxiety were far from being over. In body he was still " real sick," and in mind he was yet more sick, was, in fact, crushing—

> The lees of pleasure
> From sanguine grapes of pain.

He might affect levity, indifference, callousness, defiance ; but he could not shut off the rankling thoughts that were as " madness in the brain." The old life had been torn up by the roots, and as yet there was no new foothold in the dire chaos of things, nor much prospect of securing one. The violent change left him dazed and giddy. His essential self seemed in very truth to have died. The man he now knew by his own name, whose familiar face he saw in the glass, was someone else, some ghastly stranger who took his form and mimicked his manner. As to the man who once *was* Robert Louis Stevenson, who had walked the streets of Edinburgh and London, who had supped

and made jolly with friends, loved, laughed, and jested, above all who had been sheltered and cherished at 17 Heriot Row—where was he? Adrift in the darkness, amid breakers, without rudder or oar. In company he maintained the old vivacity and sprightliness, the seemingly-inexhaustible flow of spirits; but alone with himself in Dr. Heintz's house his gloom was terrible. Without figure of speech, his life might be described as a nightmare varied by bursts of hysterical hilarity. He felt isolated. A shyness, a timidity, very unlike the Stevenson of old, seized him. He was not sure of his old friends; and one shining star seemed but to emphasise the blackness and vacancy of the future. Two things he needed desperately—health and money, and he had neither.

"There are two great sources of literary inspiration," says the author of *The Biglow Papers*—"full minds and empty pockets." The incentive of empty pockets was now driving Stevenson to a fury of activity. In his depression he got "terribly frightened" about his work, that is, over his slowness of production. He must earn money or die. "Dibbs and speed" became his motto, an excellent one for the artisan in letters, but a fatal one for the creative artist. It killed Scott; it all but killed Stevenson then. Fear and anxiety—the twin enemies of creation—depressed his work, because they sapped his energy and self-confidence. The writer of brave romance should, like his own hero, present a blithe front to adversity; but while heroes of fiction may at times do without dining or supping, their creators, being mere flesh and blood, cannot.

Stevenson had the adventurer's spirit in excelsis, and a grit not easily daunted. For the moment, however, his nerve was shaken, and invention

lagged. He would not yield, would not say " Kismet." He merely strove with a fury of desperation which defeated itself. Racked by anxiety, haunted by the dread of failure and the spectre of starvation, he toiled till his head swam and the pen dropped from his limp fingers. Yet it was then that he produced at a rush " The Pavilion on the Links," a piece of carpentry, as he describes it, into which he put every atom of his strength and his skill as a craftsman. His success was amazing. The story vibrates with excitement that verges on delirium. As we read we almost feel his hot, panting breath and the feverish throb of his pulses, just as we can see the hectic flush on his sunken face. Like " The Story of a Lie," written on board the *Devonia*, it furnishes an impressive example of Stevenson's intensity of will-power, and his mastery of form even when writing at white heat. He was perfectly well aware that it lacked the sanity of health, that it was little more than a deft piece of mechanism, most adroitly done, that its glow is the glow of fever and must pass into the chill of an extinct volcano. It is touching to note that for the setting he returns to the scenes of his boyhood at Dirleton in the neighbourhood of North Berwick. We may be sure early scenes were much in his mind in that time of darkness.

He dispatched the story tremblingly to Henley, with the prayer, " God prosper it ! May it bring me money ! " Henley passed it on to Leslie Stephen, who, to Stevenson's joy and surprise, accepted " the blood-and-thunder " effort for the *Cornhill*. He laboured intensely, but with less success, on *The Amateur Emigrant*, which, owing to the adverse criticisms of his friends, was withdrawn after being sold to a publisher. He further wasted much time and toil over a Wild-West story

to be called *Arizona Breckonridge ; or, a Vendetta of the West*, an experiment in sensation which was abandoned when three-parts written.

Such frantic energy, such dread and anxiety, and such meagre financial results, illustrate very pertinently and sadly Stevenson's abnormally slow and painful approach to popularity, an approach as hard almost as that of his countryman, Carlyle. Some writers glide smoothly to success or achieve popularity by a lucky hit. Assuredly Stevenson was not one of them, though he is often represented as leaping into fame. Already he had to his credit work considerable in quantity, and in quality among the rarest of the day. Yet his position was still that of a beginner, without a public, and, what follows from a public, an assured footing among publishers and editors. For the *Vendetta*, even in the first flush of enthusiasm, he expected no immediate payment ; for *The Amateur Emigrant* he reckoned £40 an outside figure ; and over material sufficient to fill eight pages of the *Cornhill* he exclaimed wistfully, "Oh! that it might bring me eight guineas."

Thinking of Stevenson's fame to-day and his immense body of devoted readers, it is hard to realise how exceedingly meagre his earnings then were. Compared with the earnings of certain other authors of that or a little earlier date, they seem almost incredibly small. In 1863 George Eliot received £13,000 for *Romola*. For *The Woman in White* Wilkie Collins received £3,000 as a first payment ; and William Black was paid as much for the serial rights of a novel. Stevenson's tragic experience is but another proof that style and charm are not the qualities which most readily captivate readers. "Sir," said an experienced

publisher to J. A. Froude, " if you wish to write a book that will sell, consider ladies' maids. Please ladies' maids and you will please the great reading public." Happily Stevenson did not write for ladies' maids, but the fact that he refrained from that easy and tempting descent certainly did not aid him in those early days.

As a minor experiment in journalism, made, it may be supposed, half jestingly, he agreed to assist his friend Bronson on the *Monterey Californian* as reporter, at the dazzling salary of two dollars (eight shillings) per week. Some fugitive articles contributed by him lay for years embedded in the files of the little paper, and have since unfortunately perished. It may have been in the quest for picturesque copy that he started the forest fire which he described amusingly in a letter to Henley. In those days the starting of a forest fire in Western America ranked with horse-stealing as a matter for the summary jurisdiction of Judge Lynch. Promptly realising what discovery would mean, Stevenson, who was alone, took to his heels " like hell " ; but at night he was one of a crowd of spectators out to view the gorgeous spectacle of a conflagration, and had his moment of pride. " It was a good fire," he reported blithely, " though I say it as should not." Still freakish in the midst of much trouble, he was also generous. In November P. G. Hamerton, editor of the *Portfolio*, was a candidate for the newly-founded Chair of Fine Art in the University of Edinburgh ; and remote and isolated though he was, Stevenson exerted himself in his friend's behalf, unavailingly, as it proved.[1]

[1] The successful candidate was Mr. Gerald Baldwin Brown, who is still, at the time of writing, the distinguished and popular occupant of the Chair.

## De Profundis

In the second week in December he migrated to San Francisco, renting a single room in the cheapest lodging-house he could find. That happened to be the wooden tenement of Mrs. Mary Carson, at No. 608 Bush Street, in one of the poorest quarters of the city. There he slept and worked, taking his meals at a dime restaurant near-by. The desperate need to work, to earn money, was pressing harder and harder upon him. We are now, in fact, approaching the point at which he touched the very nadir of his fortunes; and to say that is to say that no other man of letters in recent generations passed through so pitiful an experience or one that was a more bitter test of mettle. In the shabby little room in Bush Street he literally fought for bare life. The annals of Grub Street, full as they are of the horrors of sordidness and penury, contain nothing more dismal or distressing than the ordeal on which Stevenson was now entering. How he survived is not the least of the many marvels of his astonishing career.

Luckily he was not entirely without friends. Virgil Williams, a well-known, large-hearted San Francisco artist, and his wife, sought him out and befriended him, with a tact and delicacy beyond praise. To the Williams he went as often as he could or cared, sure of appreciation and hospitality. Another who joined the small group was Charles Warren Stoddard, afterwards Professor of English Literature in the Catholic University, Washington. In that congenial company Stevenson made a brave show of vivacity and good spirits. Keyed to concert-pitch, as Stoddard later recorded, he paced

the floor discoursing volubly, flicking the eternal cigarette, flinging his arms about in eloquent Gallic gestures, soliloquising " with the fine frenzy of an Italian improvisatore," in fact overflowing, as it seemed, with mental if not with physical energy.

But those were rare outbursts of felicity, moments of high tension when the spirit within leaped up as if in defiance of the disabilities of the body. He was a candle in the wind which any chance gust might extinguish ; and for most part the flame spluttered and flickered as if it must indeed go out. In company it was his cue to be almost hysterically gay ; but alone in his dingy, desolate lodging he sank to unplumbed depths of gloom and depression that many times deepened to despair. Sick, poor, exhausted, forlorn, he lost the blithe self-confidence which had hitherto upheld him. In that mood of misery and timidity he discovered that " death is no bad friend," and that there is a place where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest. Like his master, Walt Whitman, he would fain have hailed death with a smile of welcome.

There were other circumstances to depress him. With an exile's longing he pined for home letters ; but when they came they were discouraging. Mr. Colvin was dissatisfied with *The Amateur Emigrant*, which was sent to him in parts as it was written. Henley was critical over the *The Story of a Lie*, and being in the vein of criticism reverted unfavourably to *Travels with a Donkey*. Stevenson was hurt. " Why do you say all this *now* when I am down in health, wealth, and fortune ? " he asked, with a cry of pain. He complained, with a bitterness unusual to him, that his friends thought his work " rather bosh nowadays," and pleaded for encouragement, not cavilling. Henley was urging him to

collaborate in plays, but he declined, saying he could not afford to make experiments. So far as things theatrical were concerned, he added, they were both outsiders. At best they would have to wait many months for results, and there was a big chance that the enterprise would prove abortive. Could his friends not see it was cash he needed, ready cash, and kind words and a measure of sympathy ?

His friends were, of course, doing what they thought best for him ; but it is clear they did not realise to what straits he was reduced, or how savagely the wolf was at the door. Funds were all but exhausted ; his nerves were in tatters ; worst of all, his faith in himself was shaken. Yet the harder his condition, the blacker the prospect, the more futile the effort, the more desperately he toiled. Goethe found work the grand panacea for all evils. To Stevenson just then it was the wrecked sailor's last plank, his sole hope of escaping the sea of troubles that threatened to engulf him. Sometimes his friend Stoddard, calling at 608 Bush Street, found him propped up in bed in the midst of a litter of books and papers, working invincibly. He was often so weak that when he got out of bed his " itinerary was from his couch to his lounge, touching at the arm-chair by the way." Yet in that condition of mind and body, harassed, burdened, cankered by anxiety and the terror of failure, he toiled at his romance *The Greenwood State* (the *Prince Otto* of to-day), and the *Vendetta*, finished *The Amateur Emigrant*, wrote several chapters of an autobiography, and his essays on Thoreau and Yoshida Torajiro, the last a wonder of felicity and brightness.

A year before, at the table of Fleeming Jenkin, in

Edinburgh, he had heard from a Japanese gentleman the heroic story of the young Yoshida. It had impressed and excited him, and now, as though seeking inspiration and fortitude in calamity from so noble an example, he turned to it, with what ardour the sketch reveals. He was fond of repeating the lines—

> It is better to be a crystal and be broken,
> Then to remain perfect as a tile on the house-top.

And we may be sure he applied them to himself with especial unction then. Readers, who to-day are thrilled and uplifted by the tale of heroism may well pause a moment to think of the circumstances in which it was written. If it reveals to us the spirit of Yoshida, it no less clearly reveals the spirit of Robert Louis Stevenson.

In all that dauntless, almost frenzied activity he learned—and taught—a priceless lesson, that a man may fight and fight nobly, at the very point of death. That inspiring truth, however, carries the fatal corollary, that at the point of death the fight cannot be prolonged. Hardship, anxiety, shattered health, semi-starvation, are heavy handicaps for the fighter ; and Stevenson had them all. From Monterey, where he worked with a sense of real zest, he had come in tolerable spirits. But in San Francisco the Fates seemed to be bent on his destruction. He had fought as gallantly as man might and he was hopelessly stranded. The gay, rushing world by " The Gates of Gold " of which he was later to sing, went its way indifferent to all his striving and suffering, leaving him like a piece of driftwood flung aside by a swirl of the racing current. Little wonder that he had the feeling of all feelings hardest to bear, the feeling of being forsaken, abandoned to the worst

that might befall him. For days together he spoke to no one save his landlady and her children, or the frowsy waiters who served his dubious meals in fly-blown restaurants in back streets.

He counted his money like a miser, who for all his miserliness doubts if there be enough for to-morrow's morsel of a dinner. To add something, be it ever so little, to the almost empty exchequer, he sought work on the local press. For a moment he was even exhilarated by the dream of blossoming into a Special Correspondent commissioned to write how, when, and where he pleased. Editors, however, are not philanthropists. In San Francisco they were shy of such delectable schemes, as probably they would be shy of them in New York or London, and his name was not yet one to conjure with. The *Bulletin*, indeed, agreed to give him some modest employment ; but the work and the remuneration were such he was forced to decline. Some time after his death there appeared in a London magazine a circumstantial story to the effect that he was engaged as a reporter on the *San Francisco Chronicle*, a paper of first-rate standing on the Pacific coast, and proved so ludicrously inept that after a single trial he was peremptorily dismissed. The story is untrue. He never was connected with the *Chronicle*, and therefore could never have been dismissed. One wonders what San Francisco, or, for that matter, New York or London, papers would give to-day for an original contribution by Robert Louis Stevenson ! Would there be any hesitation about acceptance, any petty haggling over price ?

## The Verge of Starvation

Then it was a frantic struggle for bare existence. The gods, said the Greek oracle, never do things by halves. It was decreed that Stevenson should drink of lees and dregs. At first, in the days of comparative affluence, he allowed himself seventy cents, about two and ninepence, a day for food—ten cents for breakfast, fifty cents for a midday dinner, and ten cents for tea. Very soon, however, the half-dollar dwindled to a quarter and the dime to the modest nickel, equivalent to twopence-halfpenny of British money. Sometimes there was neither quarter nor dime. He had a few belongings left in Edinburgh, including some books. These in his extremity he directed Charles Baxter to sell; but the meagre proceeds seemed but to aggravate his poverty. Once, when "feeling seedy" from a chill, he longed for a drink, and though worn and tired, would have walked "half a mile for a brandy-and-soda." Such indulgences, however, were for men of money. In France and London Prince Bountiful had spent the greater part of £1,000 in a short time with unreckoning generosity; now the smallest copper was unspeakably precious, for it meant life. Stevenson himself must have thought miserably enough of the contrast. In his darkest days in London Carlyle came within measurable distance of starvation; in San Francisco in the early part of 1880 Stevenson was actually, literally starving. His own reckoning was, that for a space of some eight mortal weeks the quantity of food he ate never exceeded two ounces per day. As a last straw, in destitution and wretchedness, his people at home definitely cast him off. There was to be

no more help from 17 Heriot Row. The situation would have killed most men. By what miracle did he live through it? the only possible answer is that he was Robert Louis Stevenson.

In one respect, however, the position was rather one for the Muse of comedy than of tragedy. The ingeniously-fantastic Gilbert might in truth have found in it material for a comic opera that would tickle a Savoy audience into ripples of merriment. The course of true love ran as smoothly, if not quite as rapidly, as ardent hearts could desire. Mr. Samuel Osbourne, the sole obstacle according to law, was proving himself the pink of courtesy and complacency. Constitutionally affable and easy-going (affability was, indeed, his bane), he was at that crisis of his career the very quintessence of chivalry. His wife was dissatisfied with him as a husband, and desired liberty in order to marry another. Very well! Pretty Fanny should have her way, and a blessing into the bargain. Not only would he do nothing to thwart or hinder, he would do his utmost to help. In proof of good-will he undertook to support her till the law should declare her free for her next matrimonial adventure. We are not concerned with his motive for such extraordinary complaisancy and pliability. The fact that he was delicately, generously considerate in an extremely embarrassing position is sufficient. Nor did his generosity stop with mere assent or compliance. He held a Government appointment in connection with the Department of Mines, and was therefore in possession of an assured income, which would be utilised to see them all through. Yes! Fanny might go ahead. He would stand by her and by the man who was to succeed him.

And then suddenly the comic spirit took flight

before the shadow of catastrophe. In the midst of the proceedings, or at any rate before happiness was secure, Mr. Osbourne lost his Government post; and, since by nature and habit he was improvident, his salary and his power to aid ceased together. He was pained, he overflowed with regret; but in the circumstances what could a moneyless man do? What but retire quietly and gracefully? And he did. It was as if the last frail prop were struck from under the tottering Stevenson. If money failed all failed. For what is romance on an empty pocket, what life itself minus the wherewithal to live? Another burden on a bent and cracking back—two homes to support instead of one, or a small section of one. How was he to do it? By a frantic effort he might be able to earn £50 for immediate needs. If he could make it £100, just £100. Heavens! it would be like winning Waterloo.

Gladstone remarked of Cardinal Manning that he was reluctant to die. Stevenson was resolved not to die. More, he was resolved to put his own philosophy of cheerfulness to a final and crucial test. From the depths that would overwhelm an ordinary man his spirits rose—*contra fortunam*—forced up by sheer will-power. Staggering as if Fate had given him a knock-out blow, he assumed an air of almost boisterous gaiety, talked exuberantly with those about him, wrote impish, boyish letters to his friends, especially to Henley and Charles Baxter. Those two, knowing him to the core, would read between the lines and understand. To Mr. Colvin he complained, half resentfully, half whimsically, that everybody wrote him sermons when he wanted something comic, something exhilarating. Instead of preaching or criticising,

could his friend not send him a letter with a jest in it? Oh! how he longed for a real laugh! And why should they all be so serious? Was not life a huge jest even when it had a tang of tragedy? The true philosopher should therefore smile in the face of Destiny, blithely if possible, defiantly if necessary. In that mood Stevenson announced that he was "carrying top-gallant sails again."

There were genuine consolations. After being sweated out of a pleuritic fever, he had a "delicious sense of being born again in an expurgated edition." For such a feeling scarcely any price was too high. Rather curiously, he was moved to avow that, "being a bad man," he thought a little suffering, not more than he could bear, was likely to prove good medicine for him. The avowal, however, was not made in meekness nor from any desire to honour the Christian precept by turning the other cheek. Rather was it made in proof of his early declaration to Mrs. Sitwell that nothing could depress him, not even the captious criticisms of his old friends. For example, they said that *The Amateur Emigrant* was a failure and *The Story of a Lie* not so good as it might be. Very well, so be it. Out of failure the brave man would pluck success, out of defeat, victory.

One thing he discovered, that the task of writing *The Amateur Emigrant* bored him "hellishly," though at first he had been elated over its possibilities. Therefore he was done with travel-books. His new loves were "the moral and the dramatic." In the moral vein he planned and partly wrote *A Dialogue on Character and Destiny between Two Puppets*, in which his philosophy of life was to have full swing. Further, there were to be essays on "Benjamin Franklin and the Art of Virtue," and on William Penn, whose quaint little book, *The Fruits*

*of Solitude*, much consoled him. Such flights of morality may seem to some readers to have more than a tinge of satire, and, indeed, there was something satirical in all Stevenson's dealings with his "veiled mistress" ethics. In the dramatic vein, and apparently as a sop to the insistent Henley, he projected two plays, *Hester Noble* and *Don Juan;* but though "sworn to his soul," they never materialised. One regrets they were not written. The second in particular would have been an interesting and illuminative pendant or contrast to *The Art of Virtue*.

But, as we shall see more in detail as we proceed, other influences were coming into his life, influences which, so far as his literary reputation was concerned, were to keep him in the paths of strict respectability, and prove to him the folly of Byronic philanderings even in his writings. His strange courtship was nearing its culmination. By January 1880 he was definitely and openly engaged to be married to the woman he had "loved for three years and a half," and the lady was already directing and superintending his work. She disapproved of Don Juanism, even in an impersonal and dramatic form, as something which, it might be thought, did not harmonise with the high ethical spirit which his admirers were beginning to perceive in him. If he was to edify and entertain, he must be careful not to shock. So *Don Juan* was abandoned, despite the urgings of Henley, who was a Byron enthusiast and little enough disposed to any doctrine of limitation in literature.

Small events often precipitate great crises. In March his landlady's little boy fell seriously ill, and Stevenson must needs nurse him. The spectacle of suffering childhood depressed him and affected

his health, giving it, so to speak the last little push over. Incidentally it cured him of all ambition to found a family, an ambition which was the ruin of Scott. " Never, never any family for me," was his prayer for his married life, and it was granted. From the child's bed of sickness he tottered to his own. Incessant toil, apprehension, worry, misery, starvation, and all that these mean, had done their work. He collapsed utterly, as it appeared in a " galloping consumption." Day and night he was racked by cough ; he could neither eat nor sleep ; and a burning fever, varied by fits of cold sweat, consumed him. Such was his weakness he could not lift hand or foot ; sometimes he was unable to speak even in a whisper.

His physician, Dr. Bamford, whose zeal and care he has gratefully commemorated, did not think he could recover. On his own part he felt he was dying. He was not afraid ; but he was grievously disappointed. Was he really, then, to shuffle off the mortal coil in this unheroic, sidelong fashion ? After all he had resolved, ventured, and endured, after all his passionate dreams of success and happiness, was this to be the end, to die like a miserable castaway in a sordid lodging amid an alien people and the grime of a foreign city ? He had done his utmost, wasted himself till there was scarcely a scrap of body left, and all he had dared and endeavoured was going down in unredeemed failure.

Fortunately, God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb. Suffering dulls the edge of sensibility ; exhaustion means repose. " It is all very strange," wrote the dying Sterling to Carlyle, " but not one-hundredth part so sad as it seems to the standers-by." To Stevenson it was strange, inexpressibly

strange, but by no means appalling. In the words of his own poem, " Death appears and we must rise and go." But if the feeble body failed, the mind was self-possessed. Thinking of many things as he lay there—of home and kindred, of estranged affection, of blighted hopes and shattered dreams, and not least of the long, long rest which nothing could disturb—there came to him, as a fit summing-up of everything, the best, as they are the most familiar and touching, lines he ever wrote :

> Home is the sailor, home from the sea,
> And the hunter home from the hill.

The financial position was distressing, and a touch of tragic irony was added by the incompetency of the Post-Office. Through Charles Baxter news of Stevenson's pitiable straits reached 17 Heriot Row—with what effect may be imagined. Louis might be the Prodigal Son over again, with added follies and iniquities all his own, but he could not be left to starve. In pity, though by no means in forgiveness, Thomas Stevenson at once sent a remittance of £20 to his erring son ; and it went astray. Stevenson, probably hoping for some such act of grace at the last moment, felt, in his disappointment over aid withheld, that all was to end without so much as a message of sympathy from those who were still dear to him and were then very tenderly in his thoughts, however deeply his conduct divided him from them. The thought that they had forgotten him, ceased to care for him, was, it is quite clear, the bitterest of all.

In his heart he well knew he was himself wholly to blame, that after being many times forgiven, he had wantonly wounded them to the soul, and, what was at least as hard to bear, had disgraced them in

the eyes of the world. What that meant in their hard, censorious Edinburgh society he also knew only too well. Remorse did not much trouble him, and even then he comforted his conscience with the plea that, although his sins might be scarlet, he was not that basest, most despicable of sinners—a cad. "Beside the bridge at Grez" he had pledged his honour to a woman, telling her that if she needed him she had but to call. When the call came, what could he in honour do but leave all and go to her? The casuist in search of an excuse never fails to find one. Stevenson easily justified himself to himself.

Nevertheless, in that dark hour of his destiny a word from home would have been precious beyond expression; the fact that it did not come undoubtedly deepened his gloom and added a pang to his misery. In the early days, when in reality he was merely pretending to be a rebel, he had spoken vauntfully of the blessedness of indifference on his own part. On the part of others it was not so admirable; and, indeed, the golden rule reversed is apt at all times to bring bitter experiences.

He was not, however, deserted. Far from it. The Osbournes had removed from Monterey to Oakland, on the bay opposite San Francisco. Mrs. Osbourne, being within easy distance, saw Stevenson often, and in the crisis of his illness became his nurse, though with little hope of saving him. He had dared so much, come so far, for her sake; in his extremity she could do no less than render him whatever service was in her power. And then again the miraculous happened. The dying man did not die. Suddenly the vital spark, which to doctor and nurse seemed to be dwindling to extinction, began to glow with revived energy.

It was as if he were plucked from the very brink of the grave. His feet had actually touched Jordan ; but as by some superhuman power, some gracious effort of Almighty Love, he was snatched back. As his old nurse, Cummy, would have said, his destiny was not yet complete ; and the Higher Powers were reserving him for purposes as yet unrevealed. The effect on himself was magical. His spirits rose, and with rising spirits came returning health. To his doctor and his nurse, especially, perhaps, to the second, he attributed his recovery. Of their devotion there can be no question. But the real agent was his own unquenchable vitality, and the spirit that sustained it and him. All his life he was questing for heroes of romance ; it may be doubted if he ever found one so devotedly, romantically brave as himself.

## Succour

April found him on his feet again, " wobbly," but filled with a new and radiant hope, dreaming new dreams, planning new schemes of victory. And unexpectedly, as if he were a veritable fairy prince, there came the magic cablegram which was to transform and transfigure everything. At 17 Heriot Row further representations of his awful plight were made. In consequence, one morning there was flashed to San Francisco the glad, the almost incredible message : " Count on two hundred and fifty pounds annually." It was literally salvation. Well might Stevenson say : " I always light on my feet, and the best part of my legs is my father." There is evidence, however, that the remarkable generosity of Thomas Stevenson just then

was due less to a spontaneous relenting on his own part than to his wife's pitiful pleadings.

As I have already had occasion to remark, a bond of extraordinary sympathy and intimacy united Stevenson and his mother. From the earliest days at 17 Heriot Row, when her boy, on Cummy's inspiration, talked religion and dictated Biblical histories, and particularly from those priceless communings at Swanston, her devotion was unfaltering, even when she had to condemn. Now she pleaded as only a mother can plead for the son of her heart. Louis had wronged them, affronted and disgraced them in face of the world. True, but that did not make him any the less their son, a treasure committed by Heaven to their keeping. Could they, dared they, prove false to their sacred trust? If a lamb in its blindness wanders from the fold and gets into peril, is it not the part of the Good Shepherd to succour it? Suppose Louis died in his misery, what would life be worth to them then? Were they to heed tattlers and Pharisees, and forsake him in his need? And to let him die of starvation! Their child, their beloved Louis, to starve to death in a foreign land! What would Christ say to that? How would they answer when all earthly things came to judgment? And surely, surely, they did not wish to lay up remorse and misery for themselves by an act of cruel negligence! Such pleas from a mother's lips, mingled with a mother's tears, break down iron resolutions. Thomas Stevenson cancelled his vows and saved his son.

To Stevenson, who had "existed in a circle of hell unknown to Dante," the whole face of things was instantly changed, so miraculously inspiriting and inspiring is aid in the hour of need. To him that aid was not merely a reprieve, it was deliverance

from something worse than death, a restoration that suffused and uplifted his whole being with the warmth, the radiance of revived hope and confidence. Only by knowing evil fortune is a man able to savour good. Stevenson's spirits rebounded in a dizzying exhilaration. Once more he could face the world on its own terms. "Put money in thy purse," said Iago, condensing into five short words the whole philosophy of worldly wisdom. With money in his pocket Stevenson felt within himself the strength of a giant and the composure of a stoic. In the evil day (and he alone knew how evil it was) he had protested, not without acerbity, against the discouragement of his friends when he was fighting for bare life. Now they might say their worst, and say it in the bluntest, rudest phrases they could coin. They could no longer hurt.

For one brief moment his pride suffered. In a passage of unvarnished frankness, delicately omitted from the published letters lest it might seem unworthy of him, he owns that the experience "knocked the guts out of him." It is the naked truth blurted with an air of jesting. In a spirit of glorious self-confidence he had set out to prove that by his own skill and valour he would wring an independence from fortune, and he had failed as disastrously as a man could fail. Once again it is made clear that without help, generous and long-continued, Stevenson would never have survived, never made an income or a name in literature. His was not the strength that carves a way for itself in a hostile or indifferent world—a world, as it may seem, of locked doors.

He could never have done what Carlyle did, what Dickens did, what scores of other authors, past and present, did—write and live without any aid save

what they found in themselves. Left to himself, Stevenson would have died of starvation before ever getting a foot on the ladder of fame. With extreme reluctance he now realised that grim fact. The lesson was humiliating ; but it was wholesome. It taught him that, after all, the world was not his oyster, or if it were, that the secret of opening it was not yet his. It also taught him the corollary that, for the present at least, his living must continue to come from the pocket of his father. One result was a better appreciation of the patience, the generosity, the goodness of 17 Heriot Row. From that time may be dated, I think, a deeper, truer appreciation of the real qualities and character of his father.

The sense of humiliation passed speedily ; it was indeed but a spasm, a sharp but short twinge to vanity, and was soon forgotten in the glow of new hope. He was now master of " five quid a week," a princely figure to a sick and starving man. In a burst of joy he wrote the striking and characteristic poem, " Not yet my soul these friendly fields desert."

> " For thy life," he sang passionately,
> " Up and defend that fort of clay—
> Thy body now beleaguered."

In his elation he scarcely felt the weakness of the body. He had starved for lack of cash, more, he had actually contemplated suicide ; now, like old Quarles, he could say gaily : " Let others trust to courtiers' promises ; to friends' performances ; to princes' favours ; give me the toy called Gold, give me the thing called Money. Oh ! blessed Mammon, how extremely sweet is thy all commanding presence to my thriving soul ! "

## Marriage

As soon as his physical strength made removal possible he crossed the bay and rejoined the Osbournes for some weeks, flushed with new-found courage and confidence. They lived in a cottage, which was scarcely more than a tent, constructed of the material locally called " cloth and paper." It was so flimsy that if you leant against the wall it bulged out perilously ; when the wind blew it bulged in and often seemed little better than flapping curtains. But in that delectable climate it was sufficient, and for health it had the advantage of unlimited ventilation. There Stevenson took up again, or more correctly resuscitated from a discarded play, *Semirimus : a Tragedy*, his romance of the " Forest State " ultimately published as *Prince Otto*. He was still, for all his high spirits, a tottering invalid ; and when writing became difficult or impossible, his future sister-in-law, Mrs. Sanchez, the Nelly of his letters, helped him as his amanuensis. With her, too, he began the study of Spanish, but as he treated the attempt as a joke, it did not carry him far. He was often prostrate from sheer physical weakness ; and, indeed, after those San Francisco experiences, I think, the body never quite recovered its old spring and elasticity, its power of response.

So the month of April and the first fortnight of May passed. The divorce proceedings were ended and Mrs. Osbourne was free. Her wish was to postpone the marriage for a year, but to that proposal Stevenson refused to listen. Accordingly, on the 19th of May 1880, the two crossed the bay by themselves to San Francisco ; and there, in his own

house, they were married by the Rev. Dr. Scott, a Presbyterian minister. A malicious story was circulated that Samuel Osbourne was present and gave the bride away, and that afterwards the second husband and the first fraternised. There is no truth whatever in the tale. Osbourne eliminated himself politely and quietly, and, so far as I can discover, never even met his successor. But as a final act of grace and courtesy, he gave Stevenson a letter of introduction to an hotel-keeper at Calistoga, a hamlet in Napa County, California, where the honeymoon might be spent economically. The only witnesses to the marriage were Mrs. Virgil Williams, wife of the artist already mentioned, and Mrs. Scott, the clergyman's wife. Stevenson himself ascribed it as " a sort of marriage *in extremis*." And such, in truth, it was. The bride was then already a grandmother.

## CHAPTER IX

### UNROMANTIC REALITY AND SOME ENGAGING PHILOSOPHY

The Great Adventure, so long and so ardently pursued, culminated then with little of the éclat of high romance. The professional romancer, able at his sovereign pleasure to bestow the most glittering fortune, the most enchanting felicities, on the creatures of his imagination, must have felt the poignant contrast between the real and the ideal in his personal experience. Perhaps it is only in the realm of fiction, where the Goddess of Poetic Justice holds the scales of happiness unchallenged, that humanity finds its ideals realised. Doubtless that is why men turn to it for refreshment and solace amid the dust and weariness of a world in which the ideal is somewhat heavily discounted. There alone rosy hopes are fulfilled ; there alone splendid dreams come true, and mortals know, in the words of Renan, " that strange forgetfulness of human conditions and destinies which is called Gaiety."

In that tender passage of his life Stevenson, the avowed accepted apostle of gaiety, was himself the reverse of gay. The cold, harsh, grim impact of a sordid enough reality momentarily subdued him to a profound and uncharacteristic gravity. Like Hamlet, he lost his mirth, though

happily, unlike Hamlet, he did not yield himself to enervating pessimism. In a series of reflections on human life, which includes the Dialogue on Character and Destiny already mentioned as belonging to that period, he discusses the hazards of marriage like a general discussing a plan of campaign. To the considerate man (and the word " considerate " is worth noting) he observes, it must be a matter of deep concern, since he is linking another's destiny with his own. " In all our magnanimous way of life," is his deliberate judgment, " I find nothing more bold than this. To go into battle is but a small thing by comparison. It is the last act of committal. After that there is nothing left, not even suicide, but to be a good man." To the normal man the alternative of goodness may not seem to involve any dreadful sacrifice. Probably most men are good on their wedding-day, or at any rate are full of good intentions sincerely and honestly cherished.

But to Stevenson marriage was something of a desperate venture, as peculiar and exceptional as if he were the only member of the human race who ever entered the bonds of matrimony. It was one of his most engaging qualities that he always took his own doings, his own feelings, as things new and unique in the experience of the race. He was like a child to whom the common facts of life are matter for endless wonder, and volubility. " In marriage," he adds characteristically, " it is from the boldness of the enterprise that help springs."

There is here, I think, the usual plea of self-justification disguised as an incentive to fortitude. On crossing the Rubicon and burning one's boats, there is nothing for it but courage, and in courage

Stevenson was never lacking. Moreover, he was just then buoyed up by the animating consciousness that his amour-propre was saved. He might suffer, as heroes invariably suffer, but in the stiff fight he was victor. And, not unnaturally, victory brought a heady exhilaration, a reaction, in fact, to the old spirit of bravado that had vexed and scandalised the staid, uncomprehending society of Edinburgh. In a poem written in those Californian days he pictures himself rising and travelling away to a land where sin and sorrow are unknown and men are done with the Ten Commandments. In that delectable land of freedom—

> Income and honour, and glory and gold
> Grow on the bushes all over the wold:
> And if ever a man has a touch of remorse
> He eats of the flowers of the golden gorse.
> And to hell with the Ten Commandments.

He was victor then on a stricken field; but a victor so maimed in the fight it seemed he could not live to enjoy the fruits of victory. And if his marriage was an act of temerity on his part, an act that appeared to be the very negation of prudence and wisdom, it was no less an act of valour on the part of his wife. This consciousness was, of course, in his mind when he wrote of the lady in the case that "it is with a courage no less irrational than yours that she also ventures on the new experiment of life." Mrs. Stevenson certainly dared everything. For surely never was a matrimonial venture undertaken in less happy circumstances or with less real promise of felicity. Health and fortune, the two prime essentials in such an enterprise, were both lacking. Stevenson rallied miraculously at the point of death;

but he had by no means escaped from the Valley of the Shadow, nor, as it appeared, had he much chance of escaping. In the eyes of beholders Mrs. Stevenson was marrying a doomed man, one who, in his own language, " was a mere complication of coughs and bones, much fitter for an emblem of mortality than a bridegroom."

Such was the condition on the physical side. On the side of finance the prospect was almost equally dark and disheartening. The generosity of Thomas Stevenson had, indeed, banished the spectre of starvation. There need be no recurrence of the two ounces per day regimen. But the grand project of making an income, of enjoying " the glorious privilege of being independent," had dissolved like a dream, leaving a sense of failure that was anything but dreamlike. In spite of all his daring, his heroism, his resolution, it was borne in on Stevenson that the task he set himself was beyond his strength, intellectual and physical. He had married a wife only to make her dependent on the bounty of the father he had defied, treated with contumely. Among other things at that time, he was led to consider with some minuteness the relations of parent and child. Very significant is his conclusion that the natural love is stronger from parent to child than from child to parent. " And," he adds, " it is the side which confers benefits, not which receives them, that thinks most of a relation." To the question, what do we owe our parents ? he answers emphatically : " No man can *owe* love, none can *owe* obedience. We owe, I think, chiefly pity, since by no will of ours we make them carry the burthens of our sins, sorrows and physical infirmities." By this pleasantly one-sided philosophy the child ingeniously escapes all filial obligations, says in effect :

" My presence here is due to you ; therefore it is your duty to make the best of me and my shortcomings without grumbling. The law of cause and effect binds you tight. Certain acts have certain consequences. I am sorry for you—but my failings, whatever they may be, are originally yours, not mine."

Relying on that specious theory of relations, Stevenson confidently expected help and forgiveness. Nor, as we have seen, was his confidence misplaced. The claims he tacitly made were not repudiated ; on the contrary, they were anticipated. It appears to be a deeply-rooted principle in human nature that the prodigal son shall always be forgiven, always be sure of having the fatted calf killed for him.

But the immediate situation was forlorn, indeed desperate. Mrs. Stevenson said quite truly that his friends and relatives at home never properly realised how exceedingly low her husband was. His physicians, Drs. Bamford and Wiley, did not expect him to live more than a few months at the utmost. Correspondents in England, Henley in particular, were urging him to return, and now that the prize was won he longed himself to get back to Scotland. But to have undertaken the journey then would be to arrive a corpse.

## The Silverado Squatters

It was necessary, however, to get away at once from the sea-fogs which in late spring come like an army of invasion from the Pacific. Accordingly he went off with his wife and stepson, or more correctly was taken by them, to Castiloga, fifty miles

north of San Francisco, where in the bracing air of Mount Saint Helena the miraculous once more happened. Falsifying all predictions, the doomed man took a new lease of life, a lease which, it may be added, was several times renewed when to expert eyes renewal appeared impossible. As I have already had occasion to remark, the vital principle in Stevenson was so tenacious, so abnormally, deceptively vigorous that his many recoveries when death seemed imminent had, in fact, the appearance of miracles.

After some preliminary prospecting, the trio took possession of a deserted, tumbledown cabin at Silverado, the old mining-camp, now a classic spot in the history of literature. The place was chosen for sake of cheapness, a fashionable mountain resort being beyond the resources of the family purse. The venture was literally a flight into the wilderness, a wilderness from which its former inhabitants had fled because it has ceased to yield them a livelihood. The cabin selected by the Stevensons was a decayed gaping shanty, minus doors or windows or any of the ordinary means of comfort. The task of rendering it habitable fell to Mrs. Stevenson, and in the hard enterprise of making a home in the desert she proved herself a woman of rare courage and resource. With such material as she could muster from the cast-off lumber of a deserted camp, and such help as an invalid husband and a son in his early teens could give, she put in doors and window-frames, covered with cotton, the hinges being made of strips of leather cut from the discarded boots of miners. She also made seats and beds, and in a hundred feminine ways imparted to the mere remains of a disreputable shack something of the cosiness and sentiment of home. As the food consisted

largely of dried fruits, washed down by red and white wine of native vintage, the culinary department was not a serious charge. Outside the flowers grew and bloomed in thickets ; the sun shone from a sky of Italian blue, and the scented breeze was a healing tonic to lungs and spirits alike.

To Stevenson, with his contempt for the modes and restraints of civilisation, the life of freedom, sunshine and unconvention was ideal, a sort of prolonged picnic in which household deficiencies and inconveniences were but an added enjoyment. In that delightful isolation he set himself with renewed zest to the supreme task of getting well again.

" I am allowed to do nothing," he wrote to his mother. " Never leave our little platform in the canyon, nor do a stroke of work." In the new conditions he was finding, like Browning, that " sudden the worst turns the best for the brave." In that golden climate, steeped in sunshine, breathing fragrance, and most of all exhilarated by a sense of hard-won happiness, he dreamed, planned, ruminated, admired his capable wife, kept a diary and, despite inhibitions on work, wrote assiduously ; especially in verse.

But with his lightest fancies were mingled grave thoughts, and in particular the thought of the strange destiny which had brought the singer so far and set him down in such a curious, unforeseen environment. The poem " It's Forth Across the Roaring Foam," now, by grace of the Bibliophile Society of Boston, included in *New Poems*, touchingly expresses Stevenson's sense of wandering.

> From where the dogs of Scotland call the sheep around the fold.
> To where the flags are flying beside the gates of gold.

Nor can he forget the dire experience in the gay, pleasure-loving capital of the West :

> It's there I was sick and sad, alone and poor and cold,
> In yon distressful city beside the gates of gold.

But like a true Scot and son of the Covenant, an unforgetting pupil of Cummy, he found that God was in the darkness beneficently, mysteriously preparing the way :

> Before the morning God arose and planned the coming day.
> Afar before me forth He went as through the sands of old,
> And chose the friends to help me beside the gates of gold.

Then, too, was written, under the title of " Indifference," the first draft of one of his very finest poems. " The Celestial Surgeon," familiar to all readers of *Underwoods*.

The diary, kept perhaps in imitation of Byron, furnished the material for *The Silverado Squatters*, written later, partly at Davos, partly at Hyères. In a many times rewritten form it appeared in the *Century Magazine* in the autumn of 1883, where it was prefaced or introduced by a highly eulogistic sketch of the author. That sketch in a magazine of national circulation was Stevenson's first real introduction to the reading public of America. The little book cost him immense trouble, without any compensating satisfaction in the finished article. In its final form he described it as merely " the bleeding and disembowelled remains " of what he first wrote. To his old friend Mr. Will H. Low he called it " stuff worried and pawed about, God knows how often, in poor health." The result, he found, were " good pages, an imperfect fusion, a certain languor of the whole. Not, in short, art."

Every creative writer knows—and squirms under the knowledge—how sadly his best productions fall short of his conceptions and aspirations. For him, the paradox that the best songs are left unsung, that the best poems, the best novels, the best books of travel, are those which remain unwritten, is eternally true. We may be certain that, with all their powers of expression, their superb, their divine genius for realisation, Homer and Shakespeare, Dante and Milton succeeded in giving us but pale shadows of the glowing or terrible realities of their imagination. It is in the very nature and constitution of the highest art that it should be so, that the artist must for ever fumble and grope, half blinded by his own light, in his quest for perfection. Stevenson, supersensitively alive to artistic values, was galled by his failure, or partial failure, to reach his own ideal. In regard to *The Silverado Squatters* the revision upon revision, the worrying and pawing about, wearied him, exhausted his interest, and therefore, it may be, clouded and confused his critical faculty. It is an experience familiar to nearly all authors.

In the morbid reaction from such a mood Stevenson became, I think, too harsh a critic of himself. True, the reader is apt to feel the languor of which he speaks. But there are rich compensations. In the fundamental virtue of sincerity, for example, the book marks an enormous advance on *Travels with a Donkey*, and an almost incredible advance on *An Inland Voyage*. The writer was shedding his affectations, with an immense gain in naturalness. The amiable euphemisms and fopperies of style, so much admired by a certain order of his eulogists, the strained vivacity and determined gaiety, the graceful insincerities and purely decorative effects,

to which in his early work he was addicted, are much less conspicuous than in his preceding books. The lessons of Flaubert (and of Henley) were, in fact, beginning to bear fruit. Stevenson was taking the first decisive step in the difficult and, as it might seem, the distasteful task of getting away from himself. Writing " with his eye on the object," he made a simple, honest attempt to describe things as he found them in that strange frontier existence into which destiny, as by a freak of satire, flung him.

And he succeeded. The picture he gives of Silverado is a picture of reality, a piece of realism that may be called French in its precision. Not only do we see the scene as he saw it, we share his emotions and sensations. Hence it may be said that, so far as its author is concerned, *The Silverado Squatters* is more truly a human document than anything else Stevenson ever wrote, with the probable exception of the pathetic early sketch, *Ordered South.* It must be added, however, that with the public it was and is one of the least popular of his works.

The reason for this is obvious. The style is subdued, less picturesque, less brilliantly ornate, freer from premeditated conceits of thought and expression than in the other travel-books and the essays. There are, too, fewer attempts to dress up platitudes with an impressive air of originality and novelty ; and the author, as master of ceremonies, keeps more discreetly in the background. This artistic modesty disappoints those who like to see a writer disport himself, as it were, in the dazzle and glare of the footlights. Certain readers complain that the book is less vividly imbued with the personality of the author than are some of his other works. But this is unjust, since it is to misapprehend his

purpose, and misjudge his duty as an historian. What he set himself to do he did with a success which makes the book something better and higher than a mere exercise in style. Let it be remembered that Stevenson wrote it in a state of nervous uncertainty. His self-confidence had received a stunning shock, he had to acknowledge failure in a great enterprise, which, according to Keats, is the fiercest of all hells ; he was physically depressed, and thererore apt to be morbid and supersensitive. Perhaps it is also well to remember that when Stevenson criticises himself he is not to be taken too literally. Sometimes he liked to indulge in self-depreciation merely to provoke contradiction from his friends, as Brougham announced his own death just to see what the newspapers would say of him.

On the whole they were happy days at Castilago. For one thing, Stevenson had escaped like a drowning man with his life, and was filled with gratitude tempered by wonder. For another, he had disregarded the oracles and married the woman of his choice. That profound satisfaction was like a cordial that suffused his whole being. Further, after tasting destitution he had now money in his purse. Under these exhilarating influences his spirits regained their old elasticity and buoyancy, with excellent results to his health. One sharp setback there was. Mrs. Stevenson caught diphtheria ; but the illness was happily brief, scarcely indeed, an interruption in the new, free, airy existence.

## The Call of the Homeland

In that joyous open life, with its easy ways, its flowers, its fragrance, and wide, sunlit spaces,

Stevenson, it may be supposed, was in his element. Yet as strength and the power of enjoyment increased, his thoughts harked back pathetically to other scenes. He might rail at Edinburgh, might miscall its climate, its people, its creeds and customs ; but he could not get away from it. The chain that bound him might lengthen, but could not break. In all his wanderings Auld Reekie was and remained for him the centre, the hub of the world. It was part of himself ; for it held his youth, that part which lives most surely and vividly for the grown man and most securely keeps his heart in thrall. The Scottish exile, ever a sentimentalist at the core, has one unforgettable " ower-come o' a sang " when in far lands he recalls the grey hills amid the northern mists.

> Hame, hame, hame fain would I be,
> Hame, hame, hame to my ain countree.

That refrain, consciously or not, ran much in Stevenson's head. Requests to come back reached him, fanning the natural desire to a flame. Those at 17 Heriot Row were realising with a fresh poignancy how much Louis meant to them ; with equal poignancy Louis was realising what they were to him, how helpless, how forlorn he would be without their steadfast, succouring affection. In particular he had learned one great lesson—to love and appreciate his father. It was his father's voice he heard calling irresistibly. He must rise and go to those who were so fondly waiting for him.

About the middle of July, therefore, his strength being then thought sufficient, Stevenson, with his wife and stepson, left the romantic ruins of Silverado and travelled eastward by easy stages to New York. Thence on the 7th of August, exactly a year

after his forlorn departure from the Clyde, they sailed for Liverpool, arriving without mishap on the 17th. On the quay they found Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Stevenson and Mr. Sidney Colvin (as he then was) waiting to welcome them. With the quick eye of a mother's love Mrs. Thomas Stevenson instantly noted that " Louis was looking better than we dared to hope." After a brief rest, the whole Stevenson party went north to Edinburgh.

## A Feminine Triumph

Mrs. R. L. Stevenson crossed the Atlantic in some trepidation, but also, as is manifest, with a fixed resolution to achieve a conquest. She knew she would be on trial ; it is the fate of brides, but in her case there were circumstances which might make her critics more than usually critical. Concerning her reception from her mother-in-law she could be in no doubt. The two had corresponded, and the tone of the letters from 17 Heriot Row was not only encouraging, but affectionate. For Louis's sake she would be welcomed by his mother. But his father was a different, indeed, a formidable, problem. She was well aware that in marrying her Louis had given him deep offence by seeming to violate all the orthodoxies which he and his circle held dear.

In her mind he figured as a grim, dour,unrelenting Calvinist with all the sharp corners and dogmatic arrogance which the word denotes outside Scotland. She knew, too, that he was vehemently, even blindly, addicted to his own opinion in regard to the moral government of the world, and apt to be uncompromising towards those of whom he dis-

approved—a sort of hyperborean bear, in fact, with little compunction in using his claws. For Louis's sake and her own it was of the gravest consequence that she should make a good impression, should charm him out of his supposed bearishness, win his good-will and affection. In what was in reality a trying ordeal her tact did not fail. " It was quite amusing," Mrs. Thomas Stevenson noted in her diary, " how entirely she agreed with my husband on all subjects."

Congreve or Sheridan would have turned the position into a diverting episode in comedy, an illustration of a woman's wit, charm, and adaptability. One small incident may be taken as typical. At that date the ladies of Edinburgh wore white stockings ; Mrs. Stevenson, importing the fashion of France and America, wore black. Thomas Stevenson looked askance at this departure from the normal and seemly as he understood them. Immediately his daughter-in-law discarded black and appeared in white. Nor were her graceful and delicate concessions confined to externals. In religion, in literature, in theories of social fitness, in household management, in the domestic virtues, in all that pertained to the great and difficult question of right thinking and right living, there was perfect accord.

At first, as was inevitable, he regarded her curiously and critically, with a barely-concealed bias to hostility. It was not in his nature to capitulate easily. His character had a rocklike solidity, broad-based on what to him were eternal verities. His own lighthouses were scarcely more steadfast in withstanding the shocks of tempest and of ocean than was he in resisting any encroachment on his fixed beliefs, his prejudices and preferences. At

a distance, it is certain, his daughter-in-law did not seem the woman he would have chosen or approved as a wife for his son. Now with rare generosity he owned himself wrong. Contact changed everything. This alien, this foreigner over whom he had drawn black brows, might, as it turned out, have been nurtured from her cradle in his own faith, his own peculiar doctrines, so perfectly did he and she agree.

Other considerations added their influence. The wise man accepts the unavoidable, understands how profitless a business it is to kick impotently against the pricks. This stranger, with her unhappy experiences, was Louis's wife. That was as tangible a fact as Skerryvore or the Bell Rock and as little to be disputed. An inscrutable Power he did not presume to question had thrust her into his life, to be accepted with what philosophy he could muster. Happily there was no need of philosophy. Like Cæsar she came, saw, and conquered. The rest was delighted approbation. The past, with all its offences, misunderstandings, and outbursts, was dismissed, like the memory of a bad dream. Louis had done the right thing, the only thing ; and he, Thomas Stevenson, was proud to have this clever, captivating, sensible woman as his daughter-in-law.

On that firm basis the new relation was established and prospered beyond all hope. At 17 Heriot Row Fanny fitted into the scheme of things as if she were born and predestined for the part and place, as to the devout believer in fore-ordination she doubtless was. The personal relations were charmingly easy and familiar. Almost from the first she called him " Uncle Tom " or " Mr. Tommy," and he would respond with grim pleasantry, " I doot yer a besom," a feigned air of disparagement

being the Scot's favourite mode of expressing approval and affection.

I dwell on the domestic events of that time because in shaping the destiny of Stevenson they were not only important, they were fateful. Had his wife failed, or had his father lacked the heart of tenderness and generosity which so often belied an austere and forbidding exterior, in all probability the Stevenson we know would never have emerged. Instead of the brilliant writer who has charmed and enthralled two hemispheres of readers, we should have a pale, dim figure flitting ghostlike into the darkness with all his best gifts unrevealed. The achievement of Mrs. R. L. Stevenson at that momentous juncture can scarcely be over-estimated. With a massed host of prejudices and preconceptions to face and overcome, she endeared herself to the man who stood portentously in her path as the very vicegerent of Fate. She knew, with a poignancy of knowledge that must have quivered in every nerve, that her own and her husband's future depended almost wholly on his good-will. Louis had married her in defiance of paternal authority. There devolved upon her, therefore, the hard task of justifying his choice; and her success was an unqualified triumph.

Nor was that all. For she restored Louis to his family. From her advent dates the complete reconciliation of father and son. Her exquisite tact, her finesse, if you like, brought them into a closer union of affection and confidence than had existed since the days of Louis's childhood. Naturally Stevenson was gratified. Through her, to whom they had objected, home was home again, doubly dear for what was past and the sweet promise of what was to come. Assuredly Fanny

fitted in at 17 Heriot Row as if cast by destiny for the part.

### The Highlands

Physically, however, Stevenson was still an invalid. It was thought that mountain air would hasten his recovery ; accordingly the family left Edinburgh for Strathpeffer, resting by the way at the old inn at Blair Athole, on the southern slope of the Grampians. There he was in a region which Romance has made her own. Almost within a stone's-throw of the inn stands the old Castle of Blair, much celebrated in " the brawl which makes up Scottish history " ; and to hero-worshippers, devotees of valour and adventure, for ever memorable by association with two illustrious heroes who gave their lives for a lost cause—the great Montrose and Claverhouse, the Bonnie Dundee of song and legend. According to his mother, it was during that visit that Stevenson first conceived his passion for the Highlands of Scotland, a statement frequently repeated by others. It is, however, only partially true. For years—ten at least—he had been an ardent student of Clan lore and Highland character, had, as we have seen, ransacked Celtic archives in search of a Highland ancestry for himself. Moreover, in various trips as an embryo engineer, he had been deeply impressed by the grandeur and gloom of the mountains and glens, islands and skerries, of the west. Now he was seeing the central Highlands at their best ; and his appreciation of romantic beauty, set against a background of heroic tradition, quickened to a living faith.

The county of Perth, as Scott, a connoisseur in scenery, noted, is the fairest part of Scotland, and

the scenes by the Tay and Tummel constitute the fairest part of Perthshire. From the craggy heights of Birnam Wood, immortalised in "Macbeth," Stevenson's course lay past Pitlochrie (where later he was to spend a holiday), upward through the Pass of Killiecrankie to the wooded richness of Athole, where hill and glen, glade and flashing stream, blend in a beauty that is unique. To the ardent romancer the whole place breathes enchantment; and the prospects are all but unrivalled. To the right is Ben-y-Gloe; to the left, dominating the picturesque Strathtummel, towers the solitary cone of Schiehallion (the Hill of the Fairies). A little to the westward lies the desolate moor of Rannoch, vividly and accurately described in *Kidnapped*, in the course of the account of the flight in the heather by David Balfour and Alan Breck. Farther west, on a clear day, you may see the mountains of Argyle, above the black Glencoe of evil memories, looming dimly in a haze of blue. Northward and eastward towards Inverness and Aberdeen the crowding peaks stand eternal sentinels over the beloved land of the Gael; and far, far up in the crystalline air your eye may catch two tiny specks —a brace of eagles making for their eyries among the unscalable crags. Little wonder that the scene, so impressive in beauty, so rich in stores of tradition and superstition, fascinated Stevenson. As I have said, he was looking upon it at its loveliest, when the woods were still a leafy green, and the grey granite-ribbed hills were clothed in the gorgeous purple of heather in full bloom, with an air as if scented with honey. He had more of the purple and honey as he passed up the steep slope to Struan and Dalnacardoch, and so over the stern, solitary ridge of the Grampians.

With Strathpeffer he was at first enchanted. No place, he declared to Mr. Sidney Colvin, was ever so delightful to his soul. For others gardens of roses, if such appealed to their base tastes ; for him the cool breath of Rogie Waterfall. But the tune soon changed. This delightful place, alas ! was inhabited by a " wholly bestial crowd," a set of ogres whose gross ideal of pleasure was to " fill their bellies with meat," and wipe their lips in sensual satisfaction. In a piece of lively doggerel, addressed to Charles Baxter, he relieved his outraged feelings by satirising the detestable crew. If anywhere " in God's great registration list " there existed some den " with wallow and a trough," he implored them to be off at once and seek it.

On the literary side he was finding *The Amateur Emigrant* a trouble and a burden. His father shrewdly judging its quality and its probable reception by the public, pressed for its withdrawal, offering to bear whatever pecuniary loss or cost that might be incurred. The book was accordingly withdrawn at his expense, and remained unpublished until the appearance of the Edinburgh Edition, fourteen years later, when both father and son were gone. Had any other author of his time, or of any time, such a father ? Thomas Stevenson had vehemently opposed the idea of a literary career for his son ; yet it was he who by his constant help made that career possible. His generosity has almost a touch of satire.

The party stayed at the Ben Nevis Hotel, where Principal Tulloch of St. Andrews, a friend of Swanston days, was a frequent and welcome visitor. Partly at his suggestion, as appears, Stevenson planned a History of the Highlands, with a volume on the Union. His father, as usual, undertook to

pay all preliminary expenses, and also provide the necessary books. The scheme filled Stevenson with immense enthusiasm. Of the project and its possibilities, I shall have to speak presently.

Meanwhile the Strathpeffer air was not proving the elixir it was expected or hoped it might prove. The mists and sluicing rains which drive the health-seeker, the tourist, and the southern sportsman, home were beginning with dismal earnest of what was to come. A flight southwards became imperative ; and on the 15th September the whole family returned to 17 Heriot Row. Early in the year Swanston Cottage had been given up, because, as his mother said, it was too lonely without Louis. Hence the ailing, overstrained Stevenson could not retire, as had been his wont in time of trouble or weariness, to the soothing tranquillity of the Pentlands. In truth he had said farewell to that charming home of his boyhood, and was now, though he did not know it, in effect saying farewell to his native land. His health was such it became clear he dared not attempt to pass the winter in Scotland. He must get away at once to the Contiennt ; and on the advice of his uncle, Dr. George W. Balfour, Davos Platz was selected, very much by way of experiment. Again his father financed the venture.

## Unwelcome Friends

On the 7th of October (it is remarkable how persistently the figure 7 recurs), two months after their departure from New York, Stevenson, his wife and stepson left for London, taking with them a dog (the pet Wogg, presented by Sir Walter Simpson) in one basket and a cat in another, an outfit which

definitely marked Stevenson as a family man. They spent some days in London, where Mrs. Stevenson devoted herself chiefly to the invidious task of saving him from his friends, who came much too often and stayed much too long. Their visits irritated her to a bitter impatience. For she found it both irksome and annoying " to sit smiling at Louis's friends like a hypocritical Cheshire cat." A frosty politeness was but a thin cloak for suppressed hostility. She watched the clock furtively, " thirsting for their blood," because they were a nuisance, and, as she conceived it, a dangerous nuisance. Several whose visits were thus resented were noted men of letters to whose friendship in the past Stevenson was indebted for much cheer, inspiration, and material aid. Of that fact she could scarcely have been ignorant, yet it appears to have weighed but little with her. Like Mrs. Millamant in Congreve's *The Way of the World*, she said in effect to her husband : " I have no obligations upon me to converse with wits that I don't like, because they are your acquaintance ; or to be intimate with fools because they may be your relations." It is not to be supposed her visitors were duller than ordinary men in a chilly atmosphere of disapproval. Perhaps, imitating their hostess, they bore it with the dissembling grin of Cheshire cats ; perhaps, like Shylock, with a patient shrug—for her husband's sake. But it is manifest some of them were unpleasantly aware of a radical and surprising change.

The motive for her benevolent despotism was, of course, admirable—the desire to protect a sick man. There were, however, murmurs that in discharging that beneficent duty she was somewhat acidly imperious, had, in fact, less of the *suaviter in modo* than the *fortiter in re*. Possibly she did not think them

worth conciliating ; they had not the practical importance of Thomas Stevenson. It was then she introduced the rule, afterwards enforced with scant respect to persons, that no one suspected of having a cold should be allowed to approach her husband. Any person in that unhappy condition was a " pizon sarpint " to be rigorously excluded as such. From the first she made it plain that she was now domestic general manager with jurisdiction over every detail of her husband's life and affairs, and that she meant to take her duties seriously. And it should be added that the old ebullient Stevenson was quickly subdued to her hand. Stevenson the bachelor and Stevenson the benedict were, as his friends discovered, two different men. For them the position might be summed up in the immortal words of the elder Weller : " She got him, and what's more she has him now." Almost from the beginning her masterful, managerial air caused a mild resentment, and as time passed very decided friction. In particular it brought the first rift in the friendship with W. E. Henley, a rift which, as we shall see, ultimately widened to complete estrangement.

From London the party proceeded, with several breaks and halts for rest, spending the better part of a month by the way, chiefly in the sunny air of Troyes. On the 4th of November they reached Davos Platz and took up their quarters at the old Hotel Belvedere, since enlarged and modernised beyond recognition. The journey, especially in its final stages by diligence and sleigh, or rather by diligence on runners, was a trying one ; and Stevenson arrived in a state of exhaustion, almost of collapse. But the warmth and old-fashioned comfort of the Belvedere speedily reanimated him,

and his spirits, as always under the eyes of observers, were light even to the point of gaiety. Other patients in that caravanserai of consumptives recognised him as " lungy " ; but he resolutely declined to be taken or treated as an invalid come merely to potter and cough and talk of disease. Tobogganing was the popular, practically the only, sport ; and he made a valiant attempt to be a tobogganer. The effort was generally too much for him ; and after a morning's exercise he crawled back, a spent, drooping, doubled-up figure, painfully dragging his toboggan after him.

In such social activities as there were he joined heartily. Occasionally, very occasionally, he played billiards with an abandon that sent the balls flying off the table, to his own boisterous amusement. He gave " readings," too, for the entertainment of his fellow-guests, contributions which were not greatly appreciated. His audience thought him " theatrical," " stagy," " unnatural " ; and it may be he remembered somewhat too punctiliously the lessons in elocution learned during his stage experiences in Edinburgh. He also did reading of another sort. Among his chosen books then were Hamley's *Operations of War*, a gift from a military friend ; and by an odd chance *Our Mutual Friend*. As readers of his Critical Essays are aware, he was no admirer of Charles Dickens, whom he regarded as an ingrained vulgarian, constitutionally and artistically incapable of drawing a gentleman. *Our Mutual Friend* gave him the chance to have another fling at its author, and he seized it with gusto. With the accuracy or value of his judgment I am not here concerned, save to remark incidentally that, despite his defects, intellectual and æsthetic, Dickens somehow survives,

and is even to-day the most popular of British novelists, scarcely excepting Scott.

Davos, with its bleak fields of snow, its narrow interests and "lungy" inhabitants, was drearily depressing; but for Stevenson it held one grand compensation—the presence of John Addington Symonds, also there for lung disease. Perhaps I may be permitted to refer with some warmth of gratitude to Symonds, whose books, by a fortunate chance, fell into my hands in the formative time of youth when books are influential. I thought him then (and the pleasant impression remains) a writer of distinction, of wide culture and rare gifts both as critic and historian. Of Stevenson his first judgment was scarcely flattering. Like the rest of Davos, he found him odd, exotic, in some ways quixotic. He doubted, too, whether the new-comer, so ardently literary and already something more than a mere beginner, had staying power, that is, intellect to last. "The more I see of him," he wrote, "the less I find of solid mental stuff. He wants years of study in tough subjects." Symonds had himself given years of study to tough subjects, and was little disposed to admire mere superficial cleverness. On the critical side he was greatly pleased with *The New Arabian Nights*, which he found "marvellously light and brilliant" in execution. *Virginibus Pueresque*, however, he dismissed contemptuously as "forced and flashy," and later passed some far from flattering criticism on *The Master of Ballantrae*.

On his part Stevenson found Symonds very much "an invalid in mind and character"; but with "beautiful corners" in his mind, and a consumptive smile that was very winning. Thrown so strangely, so tragically together, the two men,

though vastly dissimilar in tastes and character, became lifelong friends. Symonds died in 1893, and it is pathetic to recall that one of the last letters he wrote was to Stevenson in Samoa, although for some reason it was never sent. It told how the writer was thinking much of his old friend and old Davos days, how he even thought wistfully that he might " still set sail, an old Ulysses, for those islands of magic charm " to which his correspondent had been exiled. " But, alas ! " he added sadly, " I am past the age of doing more than dreaming of them."

The two held ardent talk about many things—books, authors, art, ethics, morality, religion, and the ever-vital problem, how to live. Once Symonds asked Stevenson what was the dizziest height he had ever climbed. " Mount Ego," was the smiling answer. " And I have never got over the dismal purview. I scrambled down ignominiously and went and idled in a sunny place, swearing that, except as a sleep-walker, I would never again peer over that crest." Yet that dizzy height of Mount Ego had to the end an irresistible fascination for him ; and not once but many times later he peered over its perilous crest.

During that first visit to Davos he wrote comparatively little, though he strove bravely. " I cannot work," he complained to a fellow-visitor, " yet now that I am fallen sick I have lost the capacity for idleness." His amazing industry, or more properly his power of application, was indeed seriously interrupted. Mentally and physically he was exhausted. On recent excitements and privations, aggravated by his constitutional malady, there followed a profound reaction, bringing with it a stupefying languor, a disabling torpor of mind and body. The desire

and the inability to work both depressed and galled him. Yet, though so low in energy, so impotent, as it seemed to himself, he was not wholly idle. In that period of exhaustion and self-discontent he wrote one of his best, most characteristic essays, "The Morality of the Profession of Letters," which appeared in the *Fortnightly Review* for April 1881. To the general reader it has scarcely more than a mild academic interest; but to the man of letters, and especially to the young writer embarking on his uncertain course, it is full of wise and inspiring counsel, conveyed in a style which has no suggestion of the invalid. And it is notable that, despite the condition in which it was written, it has no taint of pessimism, no wail over the cruelties of Fate or the hardships of the literary career. On the contrary, it is a buoyant call to valour, to self-respect, and (what naturally goes with self-respect) unfaltering respect for one's art. "We all suffer ourselves to be too much concerned with a little poverty," he observes pertinently. "But such considerations should not move us in the choice of that which is to be the business and justification of so great a portion of our lives; and like the missionary, the patriot, or the philosopher, we should choose the poor and brave career in which we can do the most and best for mankind." Throughout it sounds the note of honesty, of truth, above all of courage. Like a good soldier, Stevenson would never be guilty of cowardice, of the crime of disgracing his flag.

Of much less value, ethically and artistically, is the essay on Pepys, also written at Davos, for the *Cornhill*. Dipping into the journalism he affected to despise, he further wrote a series of four articles which appeared in the *Pall Mall Gazette* in February

and March 1881. They described the general aspects of life and employment in the Davos sanatorium ; and as in " Ordered South," the tone was that of an invalid compelled by sheer weakness to lounge and be idle. The articles stand almost alone among Stevenson's writings as a confession of almost utter impotence in a dire struggle to work. In odd minutes he found occupation in revising and passing the proofs of *Virginibus Pueresque*, which was published later in the year.

## Celtic Studies

Nor was that the sum of his activities. He was still eagerly busy with his scheme of a *History of the Highlands* which he had discussed so ardently with Principal Tulloch at Strathpeffer. To his father he sent a rough sketch of the various sections or divisions into which he proposed to divide the work. What he found most attractive in the prospect was the number of delightful writers he would have to deal with—Burt, Johnson, Boswell, Mrs. Grant of Laggan, whose *Letters from the Mountains* and essays on the Superstitions of the Highlanders might furnish useful material, and of course Scott, who may be said to have discovered the Highlands for literature. The dramatis personæ were to be no less delightful—Rob Roy, Duncan Forbes of Culloden, the heroine whom Gaelic legend has consecrated as the symbol of devotion and beauty, Flora Macdonald, and other notable romantics. He was also to deal with the Ossian controversy, a subject almost as thorny as the Bacon–Shakespeare theory ; social and economic conditions ; religion, another thorny subject ; forfeited estates ; the Highland

clearances ; and the advent of deer and grouse because they were more profitable to landowners than men. There was likewise to be a section on the taste for Highland scenery, a taste dating from the publication of the Waverley Novels. For the first time the Scottish Gael was to have his right place in the portrait-gallery of the world ; and it was to be a place of high honour. His genius, his achievements, his gallantry in war, his chivalry in peace, his loyalty, his poetry, his glory, his tragedy, his inveterate idealism, were all to be woven into one gorgeous web of romance. It was a great task, a great opportunity, and Stevenson was fired to a beautiful and infectious ardour of enthusiasm.

A Highlander, with long centuries of Celtic blood in his veins, may note, not without astonishment and amusement, that for such an enterprise the prospective historian thought a knowledge of Gaelic in no wise an essential qualification ; and that among his chief authorities were to be Johnson, Boswell, and Burt. That a History of the Highlands written by Stevenson would be picturesque and entertaining every intelligent reader of his works will easily infer. What is romantic and dramatic, superficial and spectacular, would be seized and presented with all the skill of the born romancer. But the soul of a people does not lie on the surface, and the soul of the Celt is peculiarly shy, elusive, and reluctant to reveal itself to strangers. On the whole, I think, it is fortunate for Stevenson's reputation that the History projected with such consuming ardour was never written, and that Fate intervened with other work better suited to his talents and his knowledge.

When the real epic of the Highlands comes to be written, it will be the product of a Gael of genius,

with an intimate, intuitive understanding of his own people, actual and legendary, a command of Celtic language and lore, and gifts that combine the imagination of the poet and the patient precision of the philologist. Our Scottish Homer might have done it had he been born a Highlander and not a Lowlander and Borderer ; to a certain extent he has done it. Renan, too, might have done it had he been born in Inverness or Inverary and not in Treguier. Stevenson at best was but a fascinated outsider. Had he really written his History, we should to-day be murmuring our regrets over a waste of talents and energies, as we are actually murmuring our regrets over talents and energies wasted in vain dabblings in Samoan politics. No doubt he was attracted by that pathetic fallacy already noticed—the fallacy that he was himself a Celt, a lineal descendant of some renowned chieftain, Rob Roy or another, and therefore dowered with a secret ancestral understanding of the Celtic race. Fortunately his studies were not fruitless. From them sprang the inspiration which gave a delighted world *Kidnapped* and *Catriona*, in themselves a sufficient justification of the energy devoted to Celtic researches.

Davos had other compensations. Early in January Mr. Sidney Colvin paid the Stevensons a visit, a grateful, uplifting event in their cramped, depressed, isolated life. But a deep sorrow followed almost immediately. In spring Mrs. Sitwell arrived unexpectedly with her young son, who was already far gone in what is called a " galloping consumption." The boy died, and Stevenson's grief found vent in the beautiful elegy familiar to all readers of *Underwoods*. When he wrote it he was himself ill ; and, in consequence, perhaps, of

his low vitality, the piece gave him enormous trouble. The first version, given in the invaluable volume *His Workshop*, edited by Professor Trent for the Bibliophile Society of Boston, shows him in a decidedly fumbling mood and differs markedly from the poem in its final form. Originally, as Professor Trent remarks, it was written "in a somewhat Tennysonian blank verse" clumsily constructed. As an example of the severe revision, the radical recasting or reconstruction which Stevenson's work so often underwent, the brief "In Memoriam" presents points of exceptional interest to the student of style. For purposes of comparison I quote a few lines from each version. The first opens thus :

> If that which should be is not; that which is,
> O God! so greatly should not be; and all
> From Dawn to Sunset and from birth to grave
> Be, or appears, O God, evil alone.
> Yet, O broken heart! remember, oh! remember,
> All has not been evil from the start.

Here there is palpable fumbling with confused and refractory emotions, and consequently a lack of felicity in expression. Read now the first verse in its final form

> Yet, O stricken heart, remember, oh! remember,
> How of human days he lived the better part.
> April came to bloom and never dim December
> Breathed its killing chills upon the head and heart.

The change is a thrill of delighted surprise. The poet has found fit and free expression for the thoughts, the tenderness, the pity, that welled in his heart. In saying this, I refer wholly to the

style and not at all to the sentiment, which is a thing apart.

In regard to health Davos proved, like Strathpeffer, a keen disappointment. Stevenson moped ; and even his brave spirit sank under the dreary monotony of a life that was virtual imprisonment. To aggravate his depression, his wife was often ill, sometimes prostrate. To her mother-in-law she described Davos as " a well of desolation " from which every moment she was tempted to flee. Suffering from a heart affection, she found the thin air of the high Alps too trying. For her husband's sake she endured, but not uncomplainingly. Presently a change became imperative. Towards the end of April, therefore, Stevenson and his wife (his stepson was absent at school) left Davos, travelling by easy stages to their old haunts in France—Barbizon and Paris—and finally, owing to the insanitary conditions of their quarters in the capital, to St. Germain. There funds suddenly gave out, by no means a novel experience to Stevenson. " Now we shall starve," remarked his wife when he had spent his last sou on a present for her. The pretty story goes that quite by chance he put his hand into the pocket of an old coat, and behold, there was a forgotten cheque for a considerable amount from his father. So in true fairy fashion the situation was saved.

Suddenly the joy was checked by a breakdown so serious that even Mrs. Stevenson was frightened into telling her husband that he must be prepared for the worst that might happen. But, as so often before and after, he recovered from the very point of death, and within a fortnight was able to travel northward to Edinburgh, where the couple arrived on the 30th of May.

## An Enchanted Region and Successful Work

To escape the fatigue (or the bother) of seeing visitors, Stevenson went on to Perth on June 2, where he was joined next day by his wife and mother. On the suggestion of an Edinburgh house-agent, Thomas Stevenson rented Kinnaird Cottage, near the lovely Perthshire village of Pitlochrie, and there the party arrived on the 3rd. One attraction of the place was that Professor Blackie had been tenant of the cottage in the preceding summer, and, as was his wont, had celebrated its charms in resounding verse. For Stevenson it had the additional and more practical attraction that there he could have a pinewood and a burn—" the one for his bodily health ; the other for his moral well-being."

Kinnaird Cottage, on Kinnaird Burn, which thus has a place in literary history, is a modest country dwelling, standing, or rather nestling, some mile and a half above Pitlochrie, near the hamlet of Moulin and the foot of Ben Brackie. Stevenson could scarcely have chosen a more delightful spot. In the flush of summer the scene holds for the poetic imagination more than a suggestion of Sidney's Arcadia. For variety and beauty the scenery, in truth, is hardly excelled by any in Britain—hills not too stern and wild to exclude the idea of softness ; stretches of " wine-red moor " sloping upward into glowing purple ; green, coy little valleys that hide as if withdrawing, fawnlike, from the madding crowd ; woods that breathe the healing incense of resin ; brown burns alive with lusty brown trout ; and downward a long sweep of fertile fields and pastures dotted with browsing

kine. By the open windows of Kinnaird Cottage Stevenson could sit and listen to the babbling of waters, the song of the lark high up in the golden air, mingling with the cry of the pewit and occasionally with the whir of grouse.

Romance, too, has made the place her own. A few miles away towards Blair Athole is the Pass of Killiecrankie, with its deathless memories of Claverhouse and the valour of Highland clansmen. The pass itself is a piece of romance, deep, narrow, precipitous, crag- and birch-lined, with the headlong Garry leaping and tumbling down in one roaring cascade of foam, to join the Tummel from Loch Rannoch, which in turn joins the lordly Tay some four miles nearer Dunkeld. And hand-in-hand with romance go legend and superstition of a kind to fire the imagination of a story-teller. There in mill, smithy, or rural tavern, Stevenson might have heard more " bogle stories " of an eerier sort than his early instructress, Cummy, ever knew or dreamed possible.

The summers in that enchanted region, as I once knew them, are in general radiantly fine, often gorgeous, with a brightness, a delicacy, a variety and richness of colour scarcely to be matched elsewhere. The summer of 1881, however, was wet and cold ; and Stevenson's two months at Kinnaird Cottage were passed in an almost constant succession of rain and wind. What was his loss is to-day the reader's gain. Unable to be out-of-doors, save in fleeting gleams of sunshine, he was all the busier within. Quite appropriately in that ghost-haunted place he planned and partly wrote a series of tales of the supernatural. As a beginning he produced " Thrawn Janet," the best, in my opinion, of his short stories, and " The Body-Snatcher," which is

almost, if not quite, the worst. On his own confession, "Thrawn Janet" "frightened him to death," which perhaps explains its exceptional imaginative force and vividness. As a piece of weird, gruesome superstition, rendered with the cold shudder of the ghostly and eerie, it has scarcely ever been surpassed, even by Scott. It was finished at night in an upper room, with the driven rain drumming on the roof and the windows threatening to go to pieces in the blast. By the time the tale was ended, Mrs. Stevenson related, her husband "had fairly frightened himself, and we crept downstairs, hand in hand, like two scared children." Later Stevenson became critical over his own performance, remarking that "it is true only historically, true for a hill parish in Scotland, not true for mankind and the world." Nevertheless, he owned that every time he read the story it carried him away; and he added, with pardonable pride, that if he had written nothing but "Thrawn Janet" and the tale of Tod Lapraik in *Catriona* he would still have been a writer—a self-estimate not likely to be challenged by any discerning reader.

At Kinnaird Cottage, too, he wrote the greater part of "The Merry Men," which contains some of his very best descriptive work. "Thrawn Janet" was sent to Leslie Stephen with little hope of its being accepted, because, Stevenson feared, it was "too Scotch" for an English magazine. His fear was unfounded. The story was warmly welcomed, and duly appeared in the *Cornhill*. He would indeed be a blind editor who rejected that little masterpiece of horror and terror. The other projected stories, some half-dozen in number, were never written.

## The Fight for Financial Independence

At that time also happened what, on review, must have seemed to Stevenson himself the hugest joke of his life, though then he took it with intense seriousness. The Chair of Constitutional Law and History in Edinburgh University fell vacant ; and Stevenson, forgetting his jibes at professors, became a candidate. The emolument was small, only £250 a year, but the duties were light, lectures being confined to the summer term. The occupant could thus be absent from Edinburgh for three quarters of the year, a fact of first-rate importance to Stevenson. With characteristic ardour he set himself to the task of procuring testimonials : and his friends, like good sportsmen, rallied to his aid. Leslie Stephen wrote cordially of his " very remarkable literary talent," adding, " I know no writer of Mr. Stevenson's standing of whose future career I entertain greater expectations." Mr. Meiklejohn, who held the Chair of Education in St. Andrews University, was sure that " Mr. Stevenson, more than any other man I know of in Scotland, would make the past of our Scottish history live again. He possesses in quite a rare degree the most needful qualities for an historian—a keen and true insight into the life of man and a strong sympathy with all shapes and forms of it." Another St. Andrew professor, Lewis Campbell, known to students of a past generation as editor and translator of Sophocles, vouched for Mr. Stevenson's knowledge of Scottish history, and observed quaintly that " his amiable facility of style " (whatever that may mean) " must communicate grace to every subject which he handles

with seriousness." Evidently Mr. Campbell was aware that his candidate did not always handle subjects with seriousness. Andrew Lang described his friend as "the most refined and ingenious writer of his generation. I understand that he has for some years been occupied with the studies of the religious, social, and political history of Scotland and of the Highlands." Other supporters were Principal Tulloch, Professor Sellar, Professor Babington, of Cambridge, P. G. Hamerton, and Mr. Sidney Colvin. The one name lacking that might confidently be expected to appear on the list is that of Fleeming Jenkin. Its absence is striking and significant.

According to Stevenson's own account Jenkin warmly approved; but obviously his assistance ended with approval, or at any rate with advice. Curiously enough, he advised a piling-up of *English* testimonials. It sounds almost like a jest. Jenkin was far too honest, had far too much the instincts and attributes of a gentleman to evade what might seem an unpleasant obligation to a friend by hinting or implying that in a matter which was peculiarly Scottish the electors could be best impressed from England. Presumably he was asked for a testimonial. Why did he not give it? He was a member of the Senatus of the University, and therefore likely to be influential. Possibly from his inner knowledge he felt or knew that Stevenson had little or no chance of succeeding and that he did not wish to be too prominently associated with a failure. At any rate, his name does not appear in the list of those who vouched for the candidate's fitness for the post he sought. Stevenson had the testimonials, fourteen in number, printed in a neat pamphlet. By the time they were

ready he had again left Scotland, and he sent them to the electors in Edinburgh with the following prefatory note : " As Mr. Stevenson is at present on the Continent and cannot possibly meet with the electors, he has considered it advisable to submit the accompanying testimonials for their perusal." [1]

His candidature failed as in the circumstances it was bound to fail. The surprising fact that he was a candidate at all is a pathetic comment on his

[1] The following are the particulars—with signatories, designations, and dates :

Pamphlet ; bound in paper ; 17 pp., 8vo.

*Title-page :* Testimonials in favour of Robert Louis Stevenson, Advocate.

From Leslie Stephen, M.A., late Fellow and Tutor of Trinity Hall, Cambridge ; author of *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*. (June 24, 1881.)

From J. M. D. Meiklejohn, M.A., Professor of Theory, Practice, and History of Education, St. Andrews. (June 27, 1881.)

From Edmund W. Gosse, author of *Studies in the Literature of Northern Europe*. (Personal letter : June 28, 1881.)

From John Addington Symonds, M.A., late Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford ; author of *Renaissance in Italy*, etc.

From Lewis Campbell, M.A., LL.D., Professor of Greek, St. Andrews. (July 27, 1881.)

From Sidney Colvin, M.A., Slade Professor of Fine Art, Cambridge, etc. (June 28, 1881.)

From A. Lang, late Fellow of Merton College, Oxford. (June 30, 1881.)

From the Rev. Professor Churchill Babington, D.D., F.L.S., V.P.R., Doc. Lit., etc., Rector of Cockfield, Suffolk, and Honorary Fellow of St. John's College, Cambridge, formerly Disney Professor of Archæology in the University and Fellow of St. John's College. (July 9, 1881.)

From P. G. Hamerton, author of *The Life of Turner*, *The Intellectual Life*, etc. (July 7, 1881.)

From Thos. S. Baynes, LL.B., LL.D., Professor of Logic and English Literature in the University of St. Andrews. (July 11, 1881.)

From Professor Sellar, LL.D., Professor of Humanity in the University of Edinburgh. (Personal letter : July 15, 1881.)

From the Rev. J. Cameron Lees, D.D., St. Giles's Cathedral, Edinburgh. (August 12, 1881.)

From the Rev. Alexander Whyte, M.A., D.D., Free St. George's Church, Edinburgh. (Personal letter : October 17, 1881.)

From John Tulloch, D.D., LL.D., Vice-Chancellor, University of St. Andrews. (October 25, 1881.)

They all avoid committing themselves on the question of Academic qualifications, especially in law.

position and his efforts to achieve financial independence. He had failed tragically in America ; here was a chance in his native town : he seized it eagerly, and once again his native town would have none of him. With the record closed and the sum of his achievements before us, we may marvel at his extreme eagerness and anxiety. He was thirty-one. For ten years at least he had been writing more assiduously than any other young author of his time, with little else to divert or engage his energies. Yet literature was not yielding him even a modest living wage. With perfect justice, his sponsors were able to describe him as one of the most accomplished writers of the day. How came it, then, that he laboured to so little effect ? Was the public forty years ago so dull that it was incapable of responding to the peculiar appeal of Stevenson ? Or was the failure due to other causes ?

To be sure, his gifts were not of a kind to take the world by storm. He had not the rousing clarion-note of Scott nor the comic exuberance of Dickens ; (Sam Weller alone would make the fortune of any comedian.) As little, it may be added, had he the marrowy, elemental force of Mr. Rudyard Kipling. He was essentially a cameo-worker, a latter-day Alexandrian, if you like, expert in imitation, but somewhat lacking in creative energy and perhaps too studiously preoccupied with quaint preciosities of style. To the elect he was delightful because they had themselves pretentions as stylists ; but the general reader, to whom artistic fripperies are often less a joy than an offence, was not sophisticated enough to feel the charm of skilfully-manipulated words. *The Pickwick Papers* and *The New Arabian Nights* are

both fantastic ; but the familiar fun, the horseplay of the one is instantly infectious, while the glittering brilliancies of the other are apt to leave the plain man in a state of cold bewilderment.

Nevertheless, it is difficult to imagine how such exquisite talents as Stevenson's, so strenuously applied through so many years, should have brought such meagre pecuniary rewards. And be it remembered he was not, like Landor, for instance, a leisured amateur cultivating classic grace for his own delight. With all his might, all the resources of his art, he was striving for popularity, writing for money. Where, then, or with whom lay the fault ? Probably in some error of management. He had the most loyal, the most consistently vocal friends of any man then engaged in authorship. But they had perhaps little capacity for business ; and on that score Stevenson himself was notoriously defective. He produced, wrote till he was giddy and half blind, like Hood's sempstress ; but an author writes in vain if readers are not aware of his existence. One live business man with initiative, enterprise, and a quick sense of values might, and probably would, have changed everything for Stevenson, turned comparative failure into resounding success, and given him the independence for which he was striving so frantically. I am confirmed in this view by what happened later in America. It is a statement of bare fact to say that as soon as American editors and publishers " discovered " him his reputation, which meant his earning power, bounded upward. Was the grateful change due to the finer perception of American readers or to the keener instincts of American business men ? Whatever the reason, the fact is indubitable.

At Kinnaird Cottage he was much in love with his green little glen under Ben Brackie, with its typical hill burn, "a wonderful burn," as he rapturously describes it, "gold and green and snow-white" as it races and leaps in its rocky channel or swirls in foam-flecked pools under miniature falls. In that charmed spot, as we have seen, he did some of his very best work. But the weather was a constant affliction, surpassing itself for inclemency even in the land of mists, squalls, and downpours. "A cold and a fly-blister," with threatenings of more serious pulmonary troubles, were the result. Seeing that a change was necessary, Thomas Stevenson rented a small house at Castleton, Braemar. On the 1st of August, therefore, the family drove across the hills by Strathairdle, stopping for the night at the Spital of Glenshee, a picturesque halting-place familiar to tourists. The Edinburgh professorship being still bright on the horizon, Stevenson, though miserably weak, was in excellent spirits. In consequence his imagination was unusually active. As he tells, it was during that long drive over lonely moors that the germinal idea of *The Master of Ballantrae* came to him. The book, however, was not written until six years later and far from the Perthshire Highlands.

## A Swift Turn of Fortune

Braemar, as half the touring, sporting world knows, is one of the "show-spots" in a land of fashionable playgrounds. In the midst, in the very heart, of the Grampians stands, or more properly straggles, the small village of Castleton-

on-Dee. Compared with the Vale of Athole in its varied richness, the scene is desolately wild, with the grandeur of crowding mountains, corries, and craggy ravines, the loneliness of vast deer-forests, and illimitable leagues of bleak heath, fit rendezvous for the weird sisters of Macbeth, were any enchanter to call them to life again. For Stevenson it had one supreme virtue—an air which is medically reputed to be the purest and best in Scotland. But it had also other potent if less obvious attractions. For there, as my readers will remember, the redoubtable Earl of Mar raised the standard for the Stuarts in 1715. To Stevenson bubbling with eagerness over his History of the Highlands, the place, therefore, offered the natural starting-point in his researches. He meant, as he told his father, to open the narrative " immediately after the '15, as then began the attempt to suppress the Highlands." Here, then, a fortunate chance had brought him to the fountain-head, the very well-spring of that enthralling course of tragedy and romance which it was his ambition to describe. The reasons for his turning aside we shall see presently.

To the picturesque tourist Braemar is chiefly notable for two things—fashionable scenery and nearness to Balmoral Castle, the latter being the dominant factor in its popularity. Queen Victoria, whose passion for the heather and the tartan made even unquenchable Jacobites almost forget and forgive her descent from " the wee, wee German lairdie " they detested and satirised so bitterly, gave Braemar a vogue with the whole world of high society. Where Royalty leads, the smart set and its satellites try to follow with that ardour of emulation which is the sincerest form of flattery.

During Stevenson's stay at Castleton, Victoria was in residence at Balmoral. Her broad, overflowing figure was familiar as she went in and out among crofters and cottagers, like a benevolent German *hausfrau*, bestowing red-flannel petticoats, talking pious, motherly platitudes, or giving directions for the rearing and management of children—a subject ever dear to her. In her expeditions of pleasure or mercy she passed the Stevenson cottage almost daily in an open carriage under the vigilant, despotic eye of the celebrated John Brown, ex-ghillie and now a Court personage, whose unequalled worth and beautiful legs have been commemorated by his Royal mistress. John was on his native heath, bare-kneed and impervious to weather, but the unfortunate ladies-in-waiting, as watchers in the cottage noted, sat shivering blue-chinned and red-nosed in the cold, which to the Queen, as to her Highland henchman, was but a pleasant coolness. She never turned aside to inquire for the invalid author; probably she never heard of his existence. Though herself an amateur dabbler in authorship—"We authors, ma'am," was one of the astute Disraeli's favourite modes of address—Her Majesty's interest in literature scarcely went beyond the courtly odes and adulatory dedications of her official laureate, Tennyson. And as she passed by, unknowing and unheeding, so did the world of fashion in her wake.

Nevertheless Stevenson had visitors whose visits were to have momentous results. His father, happy in the joy of reconciliation, was there as much as his official duties permitted; and Charles Baxter and Mr. Sidney Colvin came, as always, with cheering effect. More important still, as it

proved, young Samuel Lloyd Osbourne was home from school on holiday. The weather was unspeakable; Stevenson was singularly unfortunate in weather. Kept indoors by gales and sleet and lashing rains, the boy amused himself with brush and paintbox, and sometimes his stepfather joined in the game. One day, for lack of better employment, the elder of the playmates drew a fancy map of an island, and, as he records, "with the unconsciousness of the predestined" inscribed it "Treasure Island." In the hands of Fate small events take on a great significance. That map, designed as the amusement of an idle hour, was the genesis of Stevenson's most popular book, the central turning-point in his history.

Years afterward a short-lived London Magazine, the *Idler*, edited by Mr. J. K. Jerome, published a series of articles by authors of the day under the general title "My First Book." To the issue for August 1894, four months before his death, Stevenson contributed an account of the conception and production of the story which made his reputation as a writer of popular romance. Between the publication of the book and the date of the article there was an interval of eleven years. Stevenson had, therefore, before him, so to speak, the general judgment of readers and the verdict of critics concerning his work as a novelist. Accordingly he seized the occasion to make his article, not a bare chronicle or statistical statement, but a confession of faith, dealing in some detail with the principles and practice of his art, in fact a sort of *apologia pro vita sua*. In regard to *Treasure Island* readers had been enthusiastic and critics had praised—with reservations. These noted, for one thing, the author's heavy indebtedness to predecessors in

the same field—the result, we may suppose, of that long course of imitation already noticed. He did not deny the soft impeachment; rather he gloried in it. After all, what were his borrowings? A parrot from Defoe, a skeleton from Poe, a stockade from Marryat. Well! had those writers a monopoly of talking birds, skeletons, and stockades? Surely not. Departing, they had left behind them footprints on the sands of time, footprints that perhaps another—and he was that other. The chief part of the loot, however, came from Washington Irving's *Tales of a Traveller*, and there his conscience was exercised; for "plagiarism was rarely carried farther." But at the time he was blissfully unconscious of his sources of inspiration. He never suspected that he was illustrating Plato's famous proposition that all knowledge, all ideas, are but recollection.

With the ornately-coloured map and the mosaic pattern made up from predecessors to guide and stimulate his invention, he sat down "on a chill September morning by the cheek of a brisk fire and the rain drumming on the windows," and began to write at the rate of a chapter a day, a pace which recalls the feats of Scott and Dumas in their prime. When a dozen or fifteen chapters were thus written at a gallop, there arrived another visitor whose simple intervention was to change the whole course of Stevenson's career, or at any rate to give it a swift turn into other channels. In his essay on Thoreau written in California, he had said things from which Thoreau's editor and biographer Dr. Alexander Japp, dissented. A correspondence ensued, and Dr. Japp was invited to Braemar that differences might be discussed and composed. Dr. Japp, whom I knew afterwards with some

intimacy, was the soul of simplicity and amiability, without an atom of rancour in his large body. Thoreau was quickly disposed of, with compliments on both sides. Then, somewhat diffidently, the visitor was told of the story in hand, and at his own request the completed chapters were read aloud to him.

He was enchanted ; and when he left it was with the manuscript in his portmanteau. It is not too much to say that he was carrying Stevenson's fortune with him. The story had been vaguely meant for the publishing firm of Routledge, then, I think, known as producers of works of fiction for young people. Dr. Japp diverted it to James Henderson, a shrewd Scot, proprietor and publisher of *Young Folks*, a weekly paper designed for boys. If the Fates were propitious the story might be allowed to make its appeal to the youth of England, under Mr. Henderson's auspices ; and up to a point the Fates were propitious.

Stevenson's career as an author divides itself with remarkable sharpness into two parts. To the earlier and less important part belong, broadly speaking, the essays and short stories ; to the second and culminating part, the romances, the works which made his name familiar to that much-desiderated person—the general reader. The poems and the travel-books belong partly to the one and partly to the other. The point of diversion has now been reached, and we have seen how abruptly, how fortuitously, with what little design or prevision the division came. It came, indeed, by accident ; but it came. Henceforth, therefore, we are to deal, not with a new Stevenson—for in essence he never changed (no man ever does change in essentials)—but with a Stevenson who, by a sudden turn of the

wheel of fortune, is swept into the course which had hitherto seemed a hopeless aspiration. When he idly drew his fancy map in "the late Miss MacGregor's cottage" at Castleton of Braemar he little dreamed that he was performing an act of destiny. A Superior Intelligence might find that we perform acts of destiny every moment of our lives, just as, according to medical testimony, we change our substance with every breath we draw. But for most the slow process of incident and petty event comes in an even almost insensible transition, line upon line, line upon line, here a little and there a little, until, for the individual, the sum of things is complete. In Dr. Japp, Stevenson found the foreordained agent of Destiny come to swing him, as on a pivot, into the appointed course.

## "Treasure Island"

After Stevenson was gone, Dr. Japp, who liked to recall his visit to Braemar and the events that followed, told me the story of his association with *Treasure Island*, and its introduction and appearance in Henderson's paper. Never guessing what was in store for me, never dreaming that the present work should ever be undertaken, I took no note of our conversations on the subject. The general outline is still quite clear in my mind, but the sequence of detail has become somewhat obscured and blurred by the concerns and happenings of a busy life. Fortunately, however, the courtesy of two old friends, Mr. Robert Leighton and Mr. Charles E. Pearce, enables me to give precise and authentic particulars of a matter that has been much discussed generally with insufficient or entirely erroneous

knowledge. During the Stevenson–Henderson connection Mr. Leighton was first assistant and then editor of *Young Folks*, while Mr. Pearce was one of the " star " contributors whose tales were set as a model for the new-comer. Mr. Leighton has kindly furnished me with the following full and exact account of Stevenson's tentative and far from brilliant beginning as a writer of popular romance :

" Henderson's paper, of which I was for some time the editor, was an offshoot of his *Weekly Budget*. It was first called *Our Young Folks' Weekly Budget*, then *Young Folks*, and finally *Young Folks' Paper*. It was in *Young Folks* that *Treasure Island*, *The Black Arrow*, and *Kidnapped* appeared. About 1880 *Young Folks* was the only boys' paper of good class at all suitable for a story by Stevenson. The big man for its serials was Alfred R. Phillips, whose stories were of an historical cast with high-sounding titles. They always had the front position, and Boucher, who did the cartoons in *Judy*, always had the front-page illustration. Even if *Treasure Island* had been historically picturesque, it would not have disturbed Phillips and Boucher. It had to take a back place, and it was issued in snippy little instalments.

" Dr. Japp, who knew Henderson well, always averred that it was he and he alone who introduced Stevenson's story. But I have always believed that Stevenson wrote *Treasure Island* with an eye on *Young Folks*. In his ' My First Book ' article he gives the ingredients, but says nothing of a story called ' Billy Bos'n,' written by Charles E. Pearce, which was published in *Young Folks* just at about the time when he would be planning *Treasure Island*. It was a treasure-hunting story with a

chart and an island, and its whole plan and construction were similar. I cannot believe that Stevenson had not read it. I think he took it as a model. Anyhow, it was Japp who delivered the first part of the manuscript to Henderson in Red Lion Court.

" Its title originally was *The Sea-cook*. But no sea-cook is mentioned until chapter viii, whereas there is a reference to ' Treasure Island ' in the opening sentence. This was obviously a more inviting title, and Henderson did not hesitate to adopt it, even at the cost of vexing the author. In order to give the impression that the yarn was by a mariner, Stevenson, then unknown, gave the author's name as Captain George North. The usual rate of payment was twelve-and-six per column of small print, and this was what Stevenson was paid. The story was not considered important, and it was not announced with any preliminary advertisement. Much more important was *Don Zalva the Brave*, by A. R. Phillips. The first instalment alone of *Treasure Island* was illustrated—by a small rude woodcut representing Billy Bones chasing Black Dog out of the ' Admiral Benbow.' (That name Billy Bones, by the way, is very like Billy Bos'n.) The date was October 1, 1881. The subsequent seventeen instalments were not prominent—small type at the end of the paper. The boy readers did not like the story. As a serial it was a failure. Boys like a story to plunge at once into the active excitement ; but here they were kept dragging on week after week with preliminary matter connected with the inn. They wanted to get to sea, they wanted the treasure-hunt. Hundreds of them, failing to be interested in the first half-dozen instalments, ceased reading it. The paper's circulation

did not rise by a single copy. It was only when the chapter ' What I Heard in the Apple-barrel ' was reached that there was any sign of renewed interest. It was only then that Jim Hawkins became an active hero.

" I have a copy of the paper in which the serial ran its course. It is instructive to look through it and compare it with the book-form version. In preparing it for the book Stevenson did not alter much. Here and there he struck out a paragraph, here and there he added one. He softened down Jim Hawkins's boastfulness, and Dr. Livesey, who was originally frivolous and too familiar in his language, was made more staid. In only one instance was a chapter-heading altered—' At the sign of the Spy-glass ' being substituted for ' The Sea-cook.'

" It was not until 1883 that Cassells published the book. They gave him a hundred jingling golden sovereigns for it (see his letter to Henley on this point.) I don't know if this was for the full copyright or as an advance on royalties, but I think it was the former.

" I remember a letter coming to the office in which he thanked the printer's reader for the lessons he had given him in punctuation. At that time his literary style was not perfect. His ' shalls ' and ' wills ' and ' woulds ' and ' shoulds ' were confused. He wrote ' try and ' instead of ' try to ' and ' different to ' for ' different from.'

" His second serial was *The Black Arrow*. This by Henderson's advice, was written on the lines of the work of A. R. Phillips (to whom the book was afterwards dedicated), and it took the foremost place in the paper, with illustrations by Boucher. As a serial it was a huge success. It appeared in *Young Folks* from June 30 to October 30, 1883, and

was again by Captain George North. It did not appear in book form until 1888—after *Kidnapped* had so appeared. *Kidnapped* was the first of Stevenson's serials that bore his own name as author—May to July 1886. I remember answering his letter from Bournemouth concerning it. 'And look here,' he wrote, 'I must have 30*s*. a column for this.' And that was the rate at which he was paid.

"I was not the nominal editor in the time of *Treasure Island*—only a sort of sub-editor and 'reader.' I was supposed to have a *flair* for what boys would enjoy. My objection to *Treasure Island* was that it failed to grip in the first chapters. It had not the serial trick. A serial has the disadvantage that a reader cannot foresee what the developments will be. He cannot look at the end. The story was carried on for at least six weeks by its alluring title. It was best told as a first personal narrative, of course. But by reason of this method Jim is deprived of the possibility of being the foremost visible actor. Until the apple-barrel incident he does nothing; he is acted upon instead of being the actor, and as all the other figures are grown-ups it fails in being a boys' story. It might have been better if Jim had had a boy companion.

"My impression is that *Treasure Island* is still appreciated less by boys than by grown-up readers. I myself have read the book quite a score of times. I have never known a boy under sixteen read it a second time."

Mr. Charles E. Pearce writes to me:

"My relations with R. L. Stevenson were very slight. I met him at one of Mr. James Henderson's midday gatherings, and we did not exchange more than a word or two. He struck me as reticent and as one who would unbend in congenial company.

His dress was eccentric—suggestive of a Western backwoodsman. When walking in Fleet Street he always aroused curiosity. *Treasure Island* as a serial in *Young Folks* fell flat. The readers were unmoved, and the test of popularity—the reception of letters from youthful admirers—was wanting. I must confess I was not then tempted to read it despite the recommendation of William Sawyer, a poet and a fastidious critic, who was greatly attracted by the style.

" Writing in the *Academy*, the late Richard Middleton said of a boy's taste in reading that ' he knows what he likes,' and asked, ' What was it in *Treasure Island* that the readers of *Young Folks* did not like ? ' At a loss to find an adequate solution of the puzzle why a story containing ' pirates,' treasures, a desert island, some good fighting, and a boy hero . . . the elements that we should seek in a model work of that description,' fell so flat when presented in a serial form, Mr. Middleton advanced the theory that ' Stevenson's characterisation is more than skin-deep,' that the ' grown-ups in the book do not turn to the boy-hero for orders,' and that his splendid achievements (i.e. those of the boy-hero) are due to luck rather than judgment, and he emerges from his adventures without a halo.' In commenting upon Mr. Middleton's article I remarked in the following number of the *Academy* that, while agreeing with the criticism, I did not think it touched the weak spot in *Treasure Island*, regarded as a serial story. Its failure in *Young Folks* was due to causes which every editor of a boys' paper will recognise. I went on to say :

" ' It is a fundamental rule with a boy's serial that, unless it " catches on " in the first three instalments, it will not catch on at all. Judged

from this standpoint, the fault of *Treasure Island* is evident. It not only was prefaced by a "Prologue" (called Part I when the story appeared in book form), which boys as a rule do not understand and are too impatient to read, but the three opening instalments are uninteresting—from the boy's point of view—and have little to do with what follows.'

"The title in *Young Folks* was 'Treasure Island; or, the Mutiny of the *Hispaniola*.' The sub-title was not a good one, and maybe Stevenson thought so, as like the Prologue it was subsequently dropped.

"Apart from the initial defect, *Treasure Island* I conceive failed because it did not comply with what a boy looks for—it did not picture a hero appealing to his imagination. The boy likes a hero whose mantle he can don; into whose triumphs he can enter; whose deeds he can fancy he is performing. Mr. Middleton is quite right in what he says about the 'grown-ups.' All the way through Jim Hawkins is a little outside the picture instead of being constantly in the foreground. Moreover, the story is told in the first person, and for some reason the personal form of narrative is not popular with boys. *The Black Arrow* can only be considered a pot-boiler by the side of *Treasure Island*, but it fulfilled the requirements of the serial, and probably by this time Stevenson had learned something of his new craft, for in the opening he plunges into the marrow of the story in the approved style. Moreover, *The Black Arrow* was finely illustrated by the late W. Boucher and it was always in the place of honour. Hence its success.

"With my knowledge of Mr. James Henderson's methods," Mr. Pearce continues, "I have little

hesitation in saying that after the opening sentences of *Treasure Island* as they stood in the manuscript submitted to him by Dr. Japp he read little more. Whether he was impressed by these opening chapters is doubtful. Mr. Henderson was very shrewd in regard to what his public liked. 'Style' most certainly did not interest him. The serial was announced in the issue of *Young Folks* for September 24, 1881. Two fresh stories were promised for the 'Grand Michaelmas Number,' published the following week, and of Stevenson's we are informed :

> " The other serial which we shall commence is entitled
>
> TREASURE ISLAND
>
> and will be found a deeply-interesting romance of sailors of the olden style and of the sea that is old yet ever new. This is from the pen of a writer who is new to these pages, though he is not new to celebrity, and as he has produced a thrilling and dramatic work we are sure readers of *Young Folks* will give him a cordial welcome.

" It will be noted that no author's name is mentioned. The first instalment duly appeared under the full title thus :

> " 'TREASURE ISLAND ; or
> The Mutiny of the *Hispaniola*
> By CAPTAIN GEORGE NORTH.'

" The universal rule in the commencement of a new serial is to give an extra quantity of matter so

as to enable the reader to get well into the story. The first instalment should stimulate curiosity. If it fails in this essential, the story fails altogether. But a meagre quantity of *Treasure Island* was given, there was no ' curtain ' to whet the appetite for the next number, the illustration was insignificant and the lines below quite tame. What boy's imagination would be stimulated by so prosaic a statement as this : ' The captain aimed at the fugitive one last blow which, however, was stopped by the signboard ' ? The succeeding instalments were far too brief, and it was some weeks before the thread of the story was reached. Nothing could be more depressing. Little wonder was it that *Treasure Island* as a serial crept slowly along and went out like a damp squib. Stevenson was not exhilarated by the pay—ten shillings a thousand words, the usual scale—but to *Young Folks*, *Treasure Island* was not worth more.

" An interesting question concerning the conception of *Treasure Island* was raised some years ago by Mr. Robert Leighton, who was editor of *Young Folks* at the time of Stevenson's introduction to Mr. Henderson. The question is this : was the story as taken by Dr. Japp to the proprietor of *Young Folks* identical with the one published, or did Stevenson modify it to suit Mr. Henderson's views ? Mr. Leighton, recording in the *Academy* of March 3, 1890, his remembrance of what took place during the negotiation between Stevenson and Mr. Henderson, said : ' As indicating the kind of story he [Mr. James Henderson] desired for *Young Folks*, he gave to Stevenson copies of the paper containing a serial by Charles E. Pearce—a treasure-hunting story entitled *Billy Bos'n*. In his " My First Book " article in the *Idler* Stevenson seems to

suggest that *Treasure Island* was already formed and planned in his mind prior to the time at which it was thought of as a serial for *Young Folks*, but there is evidence that in *Billy Bos'n* he found and adopted many suggestions and incidents for his own narrative.' Upon this Dr. Japp joined issue with Mr. Leighton, and in the *Academy* of the following week told how he had heard Stevenson read the first half of the story, which half he took to Mr. Henderson. About Dr. Japp's share in the transaction there can be no doubt ; but it does not answer the question. As the author of *Billy Bos'n* I can say nothing because I know nothing. Mr. Leighton's statement came upon me as a surprise. It is quite true that the materials used in both stories are pretty much the same—a mutiny, a cypher, a derelict ship, an island, a treasure—but such materials have been common property dating from Poe's *Gold Bug*.

" Stevenson's letters to W. E. Henley in which he refers to *Treasure Island* have a bearing on the genesis of the book worthy of consideration. On August 25, 1881, he speaks of having three chapters finished, and in September (no day mentioned) he writes : ' I don't think with the start I have made there will be any difficulty in letting Mr. Henderson go ahead whenever he likes.' The inference, surely, is that he began the story afresh after submitting ' the half ' of it (to quote Dr. Japp) to Mr. Henderson. Otherwise there would have been plenty of copy to hand. But here the matter must be left. Mr. Clinton, the sub-editor of *Young Folks*, told me that, Stevenson's ' copy ' on one occasion arriving very late, he had to cut it for distribution among the compositors for expedition's sake. My impression then was that he was refer-

ring to *Treasure Island*, but I have since come to the conclusion that it referred to *The Black Arrow*, as Stevenson was staying at Hyères at the time. In any case, Stevenson was intensely angry at the mutilation of his copy.

" Apropos of *The Black Arrow*, it will be remembered that in his preface to the story in book form Stevenson acknowledged that he in a way wrote it in a sense of indebtedness to Alfred R. Phillips (a favourite author of heroic serials) in his mind. This, of course, would account for a directness of opening not to be found in *Treasure Island* and *Kidnapped*. It is to be noted also that apparently his reluctance to figuring conspicuously in the pages of *Young Folks* had been overcome."

## Momentous Beginnings

" I love my native air," Stevenson wrote during that visit to the Highlands, " but it does not love me." It loved him so little at Braemar that, as a protection and antidote, his uncle, Dr. G. W. Balfour, prescribed a respirator of grotesque construction for the inhalation of pinewood oil. He had never, as he owned, been beautiful ; now with his " pig's snout " and its weird appendages, he made a picture of comic hideousness. In a rhyming epistle to Henley he described with subacid mirth both his appearance and his feelings :

> My gills out flapping right and left.
> On either hand—I tell no crammers.
> Valves, like minute piano-hammers
> Go up and down with every breath,
> To make a sexton laugh to death.

Once he had been " fit for ladies' love " ; but, alas ! alas !—

> The well-known, insidious grace,
> Cock of the eye or strut of walk—

was a thing of the past. He was ridiculed, despised, avoided ; but one consolation remained, the last and worst, that—

> Nothing can befall, O ! damn,
> To make me uglier than I am.[1]

Just then he was very much in the rhyming vein, and the rhymes were to have far-reaching results. It was at Braemar that he began the long, slow process of writing, rewriting, and recasting which ultimately produced *A Child's Garden of Verses*, the classic of childhood which, perhaps more than anything else he wrote, has endeared him to a world of readers. The inspiration, as his mother noted in her carefully-kept diary, came from Kate Greenaway's *Birthday Book for Children.* The volume happened to be in the house ; Stevenson took it up idly and looked it over, thought the rhymes of Mrs. Sale Barker " rather nice," and not difficult to write. The old passion for imitation seized him. Forthwith he set himself to imitate the facile rhymes which lilted along so pleasantly ; and inevitably he became his own hero. Never forgetting his own life, as he told Henry James, he found his best, his only material in that enchanting childhood which he had already celebrated in so many passages. And if it enchanted him, why, it might enchant others if only he could " recapture the first fine careless rapture," the spirit of make-believe which once filled 17 Heriot Row and Colinton Manse with all the wonders, all the glories

[1] Printed in full in Professor Trent's *His Workshop*, Boston Bibliophile Society.

of battle and piracy. Looking back, he was fascinated by the child Smout and the boy Lou Stevenson.

He did not immediately realise the richness, the possibilities of the suggestion which came to him. His efforts began playfully and with as little prescience as he felt, or displayed, over his fanciful map of "Treasure Island." He meant merely to prove to those about him that he too could rhyme with grace and facility; but very soon he perceived that the new idea might be made something more than an ingenious exercise in imitation. He would be a child again. Accordingly he set himself with characteristic ardour to the task of recalling the fancies, delights, sentiments, sensations, cravings, and disappointments of childhood. How he succeeded the world knows. "The candour of a child," says Renan, in a memorable passage, "unconscious of its own beauty and seeing God clear as the daylight, is the great revelation of the ideal." At no stage of his life was Stevenson unconscious of his own beauty. He was doubly conscious of it now in recalling the time when, had he died, he might, as he said, have been "the subject for a tract." The recollections of the mature man in contact with "the miry realm of reality" are not as the artless emotions of the child "trailing clouds of glory." *A Child's Garden of Verses* does not escape the sophistication which is the inevitable fruit of knowledge and experience. Yet the little book mirrors, or reproduces, the aspirations, the joys, the griefs, the longings of childhood with a fidelity and happiness of effect probably unequalled in our poetic literature.

In a burst of enthusiasm he wrote over a dozen pieces, not, however, as we have them now, for

they underwent drastic changes. His ardour was interrupted by other work, and *Penny Whistles*, as the book was first called, was laid aside till a more convenient season. *Treasure Island* went on prosperously for half its course, as originally planned ; then suddenly invention failed. It was a common experience with Stevenson to break down midway in a long story ; indeed, nearly all his longer books are broken efforts, a fact partly due, no doubt, to physical infirmity, but chiefly, as is plain, to failure of the inventive faculty. Few of his novels or romances were planned and executed as wholes, because rarely, if ever, were they organic growths, products of that creative shaping imagination which, seeing before and after, makes the last line implicit in the first. By that sign you may know the born creator. Stevenson was all his life an invalid of limited gifts, striving with splendid courage and persistency to be an athlete. He is not to be blamed because he was not a giant and could not perform the feats of a giant.

## Farewell to Youth

Despite the respirator and the pine-oil, Braemar, with its sousing rains and sleety squalls, became impossible. Once more flight was imperative, and on September 23 the family returned to Edinburgh. Though under sentence of banishment, Stevenson preserved his vivacity and his interest in things about him. During his brief halt of a few days he revisited some of his old haunts with something of his old ardour. To Councillor J. Wilson MacLaren, a devoted Stevensonian, I am indebted for a vivid impression of Louis

as he paused in his southward flight. Councillor MacLaren, who is himself a distinguished poet and story-teller, writes to me :

" I had published a small book of verse in Braid Scots, and was credited with knowing something of the old houses and the old closes of the Royal Mile. Stevenson had heard of me, and, although only on a hurried visit to the city of his birth, he sought me out on an afternoon in Writers' Court, High Street. I showed him through the quaint panelled apartment once occupied by the Star and Garter. I did not require to remind him that Sir Walter Scott had immortalised Clerihugh's Tavern, for there Dandie Dinmont and the lawyer bodies from Parliament House often met for a splore."

Together they made the round of once-familiar resorts—the Lawnmarket, Greyfriars, Advocates' Close, St. Giles, Buccleuch kirkyard, where lies the notorious Deacon Brodie, Lady Stair's house, and other old houses and haunts. In George Square, after visiting No. 25, the old home of Sir Walter Scott,[1] " Stevenson asked me," continues Councillor MacLaren, " if I knew anything about Lord Braxfield ? I had to confess my ignorance. With a smile he turned round and, pointing up the Square, to the house now occupied by the College of Agriculture, he said, ' Braxfield lived there ; hot stuff in his day.' " Readers of *Weir of Hermiston* will understand the significance of the remark. Probably even then Stevenson had some dim idea of using Braxfield for the purposes of fiction. The itinerary, proceeds Councillor MacLaren, included " McIndoo's shooting-gallery, that foul-smelling underground tunnel, near the Royal Exchange.

[1] Now owned and occupied by my old friend and schoolmate, Dr. Robert Stewart.

We had six shots each, and Stevenson missed the stone target twice. I was more successful; for I struck the bull's-eye and rang the bell five times, the secret being that most of my time was spent in McIndoo's when a High Street boy.[1] The uncanny surroundings and the smell of the gunpowder must have stirred the adventurous memories of R. L. S.; for he confessed to me that, although ten years my senior, he still had a hankering to write for the 'penny-bloods,' a type of literature such as *The Boys of London and New York*, to which I was contributing some pirate yarns at that time. Stories such as *Sweeney Tod, the Demon Barber of Fleet Street*, *Three-fingered Jack*, *Dick Turpin*, *David Haggart*, *Jack Harkaway*, and *Tom Wildrake's School-days*, were then very popular among youthful readers. The boys' favourite hero in fiction at that time was 'Cornelius Dabber,' the timber-legged character much addicted to drinking rum. When *Treasure Island* was published in *Young Folks*, it seemed to me that the prototype of John Silver was my old friend and hero 'Cornelius' turned into a buccaneer." Eventually the explorers turned into a "howff," not far from the Parliament House, and there "in a back room sat down like true Bohemians to a feast fit for the gods—hot mulled porter, saveloys and bread."

Councillor MacLaren adds this very interesting personal impression of Stevenson as he then appeared:

"During my life-time it has been my good fortune to meet men and women whose names have become household words in politics, literature, art, and music, but none of them impressed me as much

[1] Students of human nature may be interested to learn that when Stevenson missed the target he swore like a lord—or a trooper.

as R. L. S. I still retain a vivid recollection of my meeting with him in 1881. His appearance suggested a dandified Frenchman, but the moment he spoke his voice betrayed the true Scots accent. His mind and actions struck me as peculiarly boyish, and this was thoroughly revealed during our visit to McIndoo's shooting-gallery in Writers' Court, High Street. He revelled in the sport as only a boy could. From the moment we met until we parted his manner was that of one who had known me all his life. Free from all affectation, he seemed keenly interested in anything I said, and his replies, at times, had an element of genuine humour in them. In short, he did not strike me as one puffed up with his own importance, but rather the reverse.

"R. L. S. was a type of man people would be tempted to turn round and look at if they met him in the street. There was an irresistible *something* which would make one do this—possibly his eccentric style of dress, long brown hair, and lank figure.

"After he bade me good-bye, the thought occurred to me that the genial and breezy Professor John Stuart Blackie—for there seemed so much in common as far as their appearance was concerned—would have passed as an ideal father to R. L. S.

"In the *Weekly Scotsman*, November 11, 1911, I had a rhyming screed to a friend, and it might interest you if I quoted a couple of the verses, which particularly referred to Stevenson:

> By Fairmilehead I took the gate,
> Where once dwelt "Tusitala"—
> Up hill, down howe; and, tho' 'twas late
> Thro' fields baith green and fallow.
> Stravaigin' on, back to the days,
> My thochts gaed when I harkit
> To his sweet voice, and heard him praise
> The High Street and Lawnmarket!

A care-free loon was I, and deil,
  Yet bookish tho' fu' glaikit;
My hero was the lang lean chiel
  Who wore the velvet jaicket!
Sic een, sic hair, and serious look—
    I envied Louis—raither!
And queer, this thocht my noddle took—
  That Blackie was his faither!

"I am fully conscious that Stevenson, at times, suffered greatly through ill-health, but I can never get my thoughts to picture him as a chronic invalid. That day he had the manners of a boy—happy and full of agility."

So Stevenson was still indomitably Stevenson. From the first he had set himself the inexorable rule that never, if he could help it, would the defections of the body be allowed to damp or dim the brightness of the mind. In face of everything he would be the jaunty Bohemian, the jolly knight in life's tournament, ever gaily ready to set lance in rest for a tilt with Fate. Fleeing for his life, as in reality he then was, he could nevertheless turn aside for the sport of a shooting-gallery and the fun of his own bad marksmanship; regale royally on mulled porter and saveloys; and in general impress his companion with his blithe, boyish, care-free bearing. By temperament he was buoyant; and his malady was not of the kind which drags down by the debasing, unmanning ordeal of pain. Hence it involved no heroic effort to play the consistent comedian in public, whatever black moments there might be in secret. But at the point we have reached his lightness, his joyous valiance, are particularly noteworthy. For in that brief return to early haunts he was bidding farewell, a final farewell to his youth.

I believe he felt it to be so, and that the feeling prompted what, in the circumstances, might have been an act of disastrous temerity. Let it always be remembered that deep down in the core of his being nestled the ineradicable Scot. The complexities of his origin, the Gascon in him, could not obliterate, however they might temper or modify, his essential self, the self which was the child of the ancient qualities, the ancient idiosyncrasies and traditions of his race. And Edinburgh was part of himself, " the gusty, rainy, smoky, grim old city " where, as he told Charles Baxter, his heart was buried, " say, in Advocates' Close." Did a dead hand lay its invisible hold on him then, did a mysterious voice whisper in his inner ear, " Come, come for the last time " ? The gaiety which had become a habit may well have veiled the weird premonition that his countrymen call " fey," the mystic sense of fatefulness and of doom which in profound moments visits the soul.

The emotions evoked by the once-familiar scenes he kept to himself ; despite his engaging frankness he had his nation's gift of secrecy ; but, in the words of his favourite, Sir Thomas Browne, they are not beyond conjecture. The old loves which, as Petronius remarks, pinch like a crab ; the old hates, the Bohemian nights, the riotous jovialities with Henley and Charles Baxter ; the flippancies, the levities, the " schoolboy blasphemies," so fortunately and decisively nipped by Fleeming Jenkin ; the " Spec " ; the happenings in the old college quadrangle ; even the escapade of the police-court ; and most of all, perhaps, the image of one " once fondly loved and still remembered dear " who had passed tragically into the eternal darkness, all these

and much more must have lain deep in his thoughts. And they had all slipped away, as the present was slipping into the irrevocable past. Yet he was true to himself ; true at least to the superficial Gascon. He laughed as if there were nothing whatever to regret.

## Davos Again

From Edinburgh the family of three went on to London. There, the way being prepared by Dr. Japp, Stevenson called on James Henderson, the visit, I take it, mentioned by Mr. Pearce. As so often happened, his appearance roused the darkest suspicions of his respectability. The clerks, shrewdly ridiculing the idea that so very bizarre an oddity could possibly be a contributor, actual or potential, to a paper that furnished high-class entertainment for the best youth of England, received him with flouts and jeers.[1] Fortunately Mr. Henderson himself appeared and the interview passed off pleasantly. Arrangements had already progressed so far that, after a run to Weybridge and cogitations on health and other matters, Stevenson was able to send in corrected proofs of the early instalments of *Treasure Island*. This fact seems to imply that the story was accepted as Dr. Japp brought it to Mr. Henderson. Probably, however, there were hurried alterations and re-

[1] To Mr. Harold Armitage I am indebted for an amusing anecdote. "When I was writing *Sorrelsykes* I was amused by an incident which would have drawn a smile from Stevenson. I went to the office of *Young Folks* to verify some passages about R. L. S. and explained my business to a perky office-boy who had red hair and a turned-up nose. 'Ah! Robert Louis Stevenson,' he said, with great complacency. 'Yes, he used to do some work for us.'"

writing of parts, as Mr. Pearce suggests, to bring it more precisely into harmony with the general tone and pattern of *Young Folks*. At any rate, Stevenson was fairly embarked on his career as a writer of serials. The first instalment, as has been noted, appeared on October 1, 1881, so that before leaving London Stevenson saw it make its first tentative bid for popularity. The fact that he took an obscure place in the brilliant constellation of Red Lion Court in no way damped his spirits. Here at last he was making a direct appeal, not to the dilettante, not to finicky æsthetes for ever babbling of style, but to the many-headed multitude that fed on the strong meat of unadulterated sensation. After ten years of feverish striving he was still at the bottom, a novice learning his trade. The remuneration of ten shillings per thousand words was almost, if not quite, the lowest-paid for any class of serial fiction in London. But that, again, did not matter. He had started ; his foot was on the ladder which his favourites, his exemplars had climbed so gloriously ; and by all the gods of the market-place he would climb, too, and fill his purse at the top.

In that brave spirit he left London for Davos, where, again by doctor's orders, he was to spend the winter, with a volume of Boisgobey's for company by the way. After a slow process via Paris he reached Davos on October 18 with his wife and stepson. Discouraging tidings of *Treasure Island* followed him. "If this don't fetch the kids," he had written to Henley from Braemar in the first enthusiasm of composition, "why ! they have gone rotten since my day." Evidently they had gone rotten. For, as Mr. Leighton has stated, they would have none of *Treasure Island*.

They, or their elders, assailed the editor with letters of protest, of disparagement, of denunciation. "This stuff isn't good enough; chuck it," they wrote with dismaying unanimity. Why didn't the writer "get a move on?" Why didn't he "cut the cackle and come to the 'osses," as a writer of adventure stories should? The editor, or more correctly his assistant, with a spirit rare in editors, stood up gallantly for his contributor. The condemned story, he told one scoffing reader, was the best appearing in the paper. "The impress of an able writer," he added boldly, "is stamped on every paragraph. You will probably share this opinion when you have read a little more of it." The scoffer did not share this opinion. He and others continued to scoff till it was forced on the editorial mind that *Treasure Island*, instead of being an effective lure for new readers, was a deadweight that frightened off old ones. So the story was cut into snippets and hidden away in the obscurest part of the paper.

Stevenson did not allow scorn or failure to depress him, at any rate outwardly. He went on vigorously with his writing, and in a fortnight of "delighted industry" the book was finished. His own estimate of the literary value of *Treasure Island* is given in the article "My First Book," already mentioned. "Compare it," he wrote, "with the almost contemporary *Merry Men*. One reader may prefer the one style, one the other: 'tis an affair of character, perhaps of mood; but no expert can fail to see that the one is much more difficult and the other much easier to maintain. It seems as though a full-grown, experienced man of letters could engage to turn out *Treasure Island* at so many pages a day and keep his pipe alight."

The self-judgment, as usual, is accurate. *The Merry Men* is a deliberate exercise in pure style, in some respects the most deliberate and determined Stevenson ever made; *Treasure Island* was as deliberately a concession to readers who had no appreciation whatever of style, who regarded it, in fact, as a dull, dreary affectation. And yet the tale was a failure. What was the cause? Was the story not good enough, or was it not bad enough? At any rate, it was not what the readers of *Young Folks* wanted. In the article just noticed he confessed that at that early stage in the book's career he was "very close on despair," though he "shut his mouth tight" and went resolutely on, as the brave man does and must.

The second winter at Davos proved both happier and more fruitful than the first. The Stevensons rented a house for themselves, the Chalet am Stein, a sort of annex of the Hotel Buol, overlooking the English chapel and near the house of Symonds. The presence of Symonds (he remained there for the rest of his life) did much to reconcile Stevenson to the cramped, monotonous conditions of a sanatorium; and the old friendship deepened to a feeling of mutual affection. Having finished *Treasure Island*, Stevenson turned with somewhat abated ardour to *The Silverado Squatters*, which, as already recorded, was "written up" from the diary kept on the spot. It was, as he said, a tough undertaking, and he was himself far from elated with the result; yet discerning readers will, I think, agree that in its class it stands out as one of the best, if not one of the most popular, of his works. He had besides several magazine articles in hand, among them the much-discussed "Gossip on Romance," which he quite adequately described to Henley as

" a chatty paper," but " all at loose ends." There, too, was written the greater part of *Talks and Talkers*, in which Symonds appears as Opalstein ; other friends from whom he took hints were Henley, Fleeming Jenkin, his cousin Bob, and Walter Simpson, all notable talkers, except the last, who was more remarkable for his eloquent silences than for his eagerness or fluency of speech. Just then he also wrote the preface to *Familiar Studies ;* and prefaces with him were elaborate works of art on which he spent much time and effort. The Edinburgh professorship, too, was still an inspiring hope ; and it occurred to him, as he explained to his father, that he should give the electors a real taste of his quality by writing something historical, for choice an account of the Appin murder, but, like so many of his schemes, the proposal came to nothing. Yet another project which moved him to an immense enthusiasm was a Life of Hazlitt, who, he declared, " fitted him like a glove." There ensued a correspondence with Bentley, then in the front rank of London publishers ; but it too was abandoned. Hazlitt, as we have seen, was one of his early models, and, as several essays show, was for a time a vital influence. In view of Stevenson's admiration, it is interesting, if not instructive, to recall the opinion of a yet greater writer. " He " (W. F. Schlegel), Byron wrote in his journal just sixty years earlier, " is like Hazlitt in English, who *talks pimples :* a red and white corruption rising up (in little imitations of mountains upon a map), but contain nothing and discharge nothing except their own humours." How fortunate it is that literature is a house of many mansions with ample room for every talent, every taste. On the disparagement of Byron, as on the fervid admiration

of Stevenson, the marginal comment might well be *cum grano salis*. Among other works planned with equal enthusiasm were *Jerry Abershaw ; a Tale of Putney Heath*, and *The Squaw Man ; or, the Wild West*. Over the first in particular his joy was lyrical, " Jerry Abershaw ! Oh, what a title ! " he exclaimed rapturously. And he kept repeating " Jerry Abershaw, Jerry Abershaw," like the refrain of a catchy song. But the enchanting hero with the poetic name, who was to rival Robin Hood in feats of daring and gallantry, on Putney Heath, never emerged from the nebulous region of fancy. The tale appears to have been conceived somewhat in the vein of G. P. R. James, once the idol of romantic English youth, only with a dash, a thrilling excitement, far beyond James.

Several months earlier Stevenson had his first sharp attack of political fever. In February 1881 came the disaster, the disgrace, as he conceived it, of Majuba Hill, when an attacking British force was defeated and the leader, Sir George Colley, was killed. To Stevenson the disgrace lay, not in the defeat, but in the attack. It was shameful, he thought, that a powerful nation, ostensibly devoted to the cause of freedom and much given to homilies on the subject, should try to crush a small, comparatively-weak people who had gone out into the wilderness to obtain liberty and make themselves a home. Once in the Highlands—at Kinnaird Cottage, to be precise—he rushed upon a man who was rather brutally beating a dog. " It's not your dog," retorted the owner. " No," said Stevenson angrily, " but it's God's dog, and I am not going to see you ill-use it." Here was a case of outrageous ill-usage, of the violation of God's law and the rights of man, by a pack of juggling politicians. It was an instance

of a great Empire and little minds going ill together. Mr. Gladstone was in power, and he detested Mr. Gladstone with all the Tory rancour of 17 Heriot Row seven times heated. Unable to restrain himself, he protested in one of the most vigorous pieces of prose he ever wrote. He had been a Jingo, he said, when Jingoism was in season. But " a man may have been a Jingo from a sense, perhaps mistaken, of the obligations, the greatness, and the danger of his native land, and not from any brutal greed of aggrandisement or cheap love of drums and regimental columns . . . I was not ashamed to be the countryman of Jingoes ; but I am beginning to grow ashamed of being the kin of those who are now fighting ; I should rather say who are sending men to fight in this unmanly Transvaal War . . . We are in the wrong, or all that we profess is false ; blood has been shed, glory lost, and, I fear, honour also." He adjured his countrymen to be wise ere it was too late ; and there follow the almost prophetic words, " There may come in the history of England—for that is not yet concluded—a time when she shall also come to be oppressed by some big neighbour." Finally, he declared, there is no prestige like the prestige of being just.[1] It is Burke's plea over again that magnanimity in politics is not seldom the truest wisdom.

The protest was written in a fury of indignation ; but, so far as I can discover, it was suppressed. Mr. Hellman, after examination of the document

[1] Prose pieces, edited by George S. Hellman, Bibliophile Society of Boston. It may be recalled that it was for his gallantry and skill at Majuba that General Sir Hector Macdonald (" Fighting Mac ") won his commission from the ranks. Twenty years later, in the second Boer War, he commanded the Highland Brigade with signal distinction. Stevenson was always deeply interested in military adventure. After Roberts's famous march on Kandahar he insisted on being addressed as Mr. Peswar Kotal Stevenson.

and the circumstances, believes, and probably he is right, that the suppression was due to the keen business sense of Mrs. Stevenson. Her point of view is easily understood ; and none can call it unreasonable. Here he was vehemently denouncing his own countrymen. Could he afford it ? Could he, an author struggling for recognition, risk the peril of offending the very people whose suffrages he sought, who could make or mar his fortune ? His reputation, his very bread and butter, were at stake. Besides, what earthly good would a wild letter in the newspapers do ? Prudence prevailed, and the fiery protest was put away to come to light again twenty years after his death, in a New York sale-room.

ERRATUM

One slight error may conveniently be corrected here. In the footnote on page 344, Volume I, it is inadvertently stated that General Sir Hector Macdonald won his commission at Majuba ; "Majuba" should of course be "Kandahar." But at Majuba "Fighting Mac" especially distinguished himself somewhat in the manner of Nelson at Copenhagen, though he could not avert disaster.

## Recreations and Depression

In regard to health, that second visit to Davos proved little better than the first ; but financial prospects were decidedly brightening, and Stevenson, with his mercurial temperament, had spasms of high spirits. His thoughts went back to Edinburgh, not the dour, sentimental, or rigidly-righteous Edinburgh, but the comic and the jovial. With youthful glee he recalled the images of old

cronies and the joys of the light-hearted time when he and they were boon oracles of the tavern. And out of the wine-scented past rose one figure which irresistibly moved his mirth, the figure of one Brash, a publican, who had once effectively ministered to convivial delights. The merry muse was tickled, and he indulged himself with a series of free-and-easy lampoons on the defunct tavern-keeper. In truth his gift for satire was of the slenderest. "The Dunciad," "Holy Willie's Prayer," and similar pungencies were not at all "in his line." Nevertheless, it was great fun to let the comic spirit go, and he announced himself joyously as the author of "Brashiana," a work, sir, to be perused with side-splitting laughter.

In the same spirit of frolic he took up the old game of "tin-soldiers" with his stepson, Sam Osbourne, entering into it with the zest of the perennial schoolboy. In an attic reached by a ladder, the rival commanders marshalled their forces with all the pomp and circumstance of a great campaign. The rules of war were strictly observed—so far as the amateur strategists knew them—with momentous evolutions in face of the enemy, daring attacks, counter-attacks, sudden sorties, and periods of painful attrition. The elder general found time and energy to establish a press-bureau (a most unmilitary act) from which were issued the *Glendarule Times*, the *Yellobally Record*, and later, after the hanging of an offending editor, the *Herald*. Those picturesque sheets chronicled the daily and hourly vicissitudes of war, with glowing descriptions of military operations, glorifying one side or the other as the correspondent happened to be a partisan of General Osbourne or General Stevenson.

Yet more exhilarating was the fun of setting up a toy press belonging to young Osbourne, and establishing, on an uncommercial basis, the firm of S. L. Osbourne & Co., printers and publishers. The firm was devoted to works of high original merit; and that these might be assured, the partners were their own authors and artists. Mr. Osbourne wrote prose tales of gory, hair-raising adventure; Mr. Stevenson, being a poet, supplied deliciously-arresting verse. And, not content with poetry, Mr. Stevenson invaded the fine-art department, where his partner, according to the deed of agreement, was to hold sole control; and there in rapturous glee designed and executed illustrations and woodcuts unparalleled of their kind. "I dote on woodcuts," he told his mother; and of two specimens sent in February 1882 as gifts to 17 Heriot Row he observed, "If my father doesn't like them he is no true man."

Again a publicity department was established; and the firm generously supplied its own press notices of its own works. *Not I and other Poems*, by Robert Louis Stevenson, was described as "a volume of enchanting poetry," while a treatise on *Moral Emblems*, by the same author, had "only to be seen to be admired." Of this distinguished work there were two editions—an édition de luxe for connoisseurs, and a popular edition for the million, "small paper, cuts slightly worn, a *great bargain*." *The Graver and the Pen; or, Scenes from Nature*, with appropriate verses and illustrations by the author of *Moral Emblems*, and *The Blue Scalper*, by Mr. Stevenson, were advertised with becoming modesty as unique in the annals of literature and art. That the public might be thoroughly enlightened, *Not I* contained a poem

giving a history of the publication and by implication of others :

> The pamphlet here presented
> Was planned and printed by
> A printer unindented.
> A bard whom all decry.

Finally there was a touching apology for—

> The smallness of the page
> And of the printer.

Under the stress of so much business the Davos Press broke down, was transferred to 17 Heriot Row, and eventually the works in hand were finished with the aid of a printer at Kingussie. According to advertisement, the publications were obtainable from " the publishers and all respectable booksellers." To-day they are much prized by collectors of Stevensoniana, a numerous and ardent clan, and are objects of keen competition in auction-rooms.

Those light-hearted diversions of a sick man have been much celebrated as proofs of an indomitable spirit of cheerfulness ; and surely the claim is well and justly made. It is true that, amid manifold, but not unparalleled, difficulties and causes of dejection, he bore himself with fortitude, at times even with a boyish exuberance of spirits. But it is only half the truth ; Stevenson has been a grievous sufferer from half-truths. The playthings were in reality but handy devices for keeping the ancient enemy at bay, an anodyne, like dram-drinking, sweet to the taste and momentarily effective in inducing forgetfulness. A famous contemporary man of letters said of himself that he was double, and that while one half of him

laughed the other half wept. The description may not inaptly be applied to Stevenson—only he was meticulously careful to do his weeping in private and his laughing in public.

The two personalities in him, the Gascon and the Scot, waged a lifelong internecine strife. The Gascon, lying near the surface, was ebullient, ostentatious, an egotist if not a braggart, eager to show himself the light and airy philosopher who could turn Fortune's buffets to a merry jest : one who never forgot.

> That madcap yet superior praise doth win.
> Who out of hope even casts his cap at sin.

But deep down in the core, the very marrow of being, lay the inalienable Scot with his long inheritance of sentiment, his brooding, his black moods, his grim, weird Calvinism, his haunting sense of the beating, baffling chaos and tragedy of things. Over tin soldiers and toy printing-presses, over the gay and the spectacular, the Gascon triumphed ; but in the hours of reflection and sadness, when darkness steals upon the soul like falling night, he was eclipsed, almost extinguished, by the Scot.

All his ardours of play, all his strenuous, persistent blitheness, did not save Stevenson from the deeps of foreboding and depression. In the one grand essential of health Davos was a failure ; and in a very pertinent sense he was himself a failure. The financial position, as I have said, had improved; but he was not yet self-supporting. Moreover, he had now a family to maintain, education bills and, alas ! ever-multiplying medical fees to pay. It wounded his pride to think that the real bread-winner was still his father in Edinburgh, and his

father had been so generous ! A sense of inability, of failure pressed upon him. With a quivering of the nerves, a sinking of the heart, he felt that his powers were unequal to the demands upon them. Work, real work, progressed slowly and painfully, though he did his utmost, keeping at it till his head swam. The last hope in Edinburgh too had vanished, for the much-desired professorship was given to another. He had been greatly heartened over the prospect of the modest £250 a year. Now that also was gone. To add to his troubles, he hurt his knee and for some time was scarcely able to stir. These things brought fits of gloom which no jaunty bravado, no ostentatious gospel of happiness, could dispel or dissemble. Others, indeed, he might fool ; himself he could not fool. For the inexorable Scot was far too hard-headed, far too clear-sighted, to be the victim of self-deception in such matters.

To Charles Baxter, with whom, for reasons already indicated, he was always frank, he opened his heart. In December 1881, such was the tragic complication of affairs, he could not help confessing, " I do not know what is to become of us." Once again his thoughts went back pathetically to earlier, and, as it seemed, unspeakably happier, days, days which the Scots sentimentalist was fondly idealising. Oh that he couid pass once more with Baxter or another through " the great clanging college archway," look in on Brash, with his fragrant cure for the blues, or revisit " the ever-glorious Lothian Road " and " the dear, mysterious Leith Walk " ! It brought a pang to think the old days were gone, never to be revived. He craved for sympathy and affection, the sympathy and the affection which the understanding heart of

Baxter could give. With touching home-sickness he begged for news of the old place—something cheery, a little Edinburgh gossip if nothing better were going, something with a dash of the old spice, anything that might raise his spirits and help to lift him out of his slough of despond.

His wife had been ordered to Berne for her health. On Christmas Day she was returning, and he went to meet her. The latter part of the journey back was done in an open sleigh ; the cold was intense and the company frozen and dejected. Stevenson, as usual resolutely cheerful, kept up as long as he could " in imitation of a street singer." Then he too collapsed into a condition of " dumb wretchedness." Fortunately none of the party was any the worse.

In such circumstances and with such feelings he passed his thirty-first birthday and saw the year closing. The Gascon had sunk out of sight. He was not dead, for he was hardy and tenacious of life. But he had taken leave of his airy youth. Never again was he to be what he had been.

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